

RESTORING OURSELVES THROUGH TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE AND INTERFAITH
PEACEBUILDING – SEEKING ALTERNATIVE WAYS TO THEOLOGICALLY COEXIST

A PROJECT FOR UNITED RELIGIONS INITIATIVE

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ABSTRACT

RESTORING OURSELVES THROUGH TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE AND INTERFAITH PEACEBUILDING – SEEKING ALTERNATIVE WAYS TO THEOLOGICALLY COEXIST A PROJECT FOR UNITED RELIGIONS INITIATIVE

by

Karen Leslie Hernandez

The intentional integration of both interfaith peacebuilding and restorative justice practices does not exist, at least how I envision it. I embarked on this process to explore the possibilities of putting these two practices together in an attempt to find a new vision to interfaith peacebuilding and restorative justice processes. While I understand I single-handedly cannot “save the world,” I can contribute to interfaith peacebuilding efforts worldwide with innovative, restorative practices that allow for healing, transformation and change.

The United Religions Initiative is the largest, interfaith, grassroots, peacebuilding organization in the world. Working with URI for over seven years now, I embarked on this project for the organization and their staff members who work in every major region across the planet. These staff members are my friends and my colleagues and not only do they experience the ramifications of conflict in ways I will never understand, but their communities do as well.

This project not only has a paper, but there is also a tool-kit. Integrating many of the ideas and philosophies from the paper, the tool-kit is a practical guide through interfaith peacebuilding and restorative justice practices that can empower and heal those that have experienced violence and conflict in more holistic, mindful and self-compassionate ways.

Acknowledgements

With deep gratitude, I thank the many who have traveled this path with me. Professors, my family and friends – those who believed in me and empowered me to keep striving when I wasn't sure I could. My daughter, Katy Andrews, my mentor, Victor Kazanjian, my mom, Sylvia Warden, and my sister, Candice Brillard.

For all the teachers and professors I had along the way - Phyllis Gleason, Elie Wiesel, Jane Smith, Mark Heim, Sally Merry, Craig Murphy, Karen Dalton, Najeeba Syeed, Andrew Dreitcer, and so many more – who gifted their knowledge and wisdom in ways that have helped me grow as a student, scholar and human being. The journey from high school drop-out to this moment is not without incredible triumph. Yet, without those named and the countless others not named, I simply would not be here.

To each and every one of you that carried me - I am in awe of you. I am forever appreciative of your presence and guidance on this incredible journey I never imagined.

Thank you for walking with me.

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Dedication

To my United Religions Initiative family who are out there every day, many literally risking their lives to make the world a better, more peaceful and just place. Your courage, passion, dedication and compassion for building bridges is, many times, inconceivable. You are honorable.

Gracias.

Introduction

Restorative Justice and Interfaith Peacebuilding – A New Vision

Violence and conflict have existed since the beginning of humankind. In response, humans have a tendency to lean toward retaliation and vengeance before considering a peaceful resolution to conflict or a violent act. We witnessed this with both World Wars and here in the United States, we witnessed retaliation after 9/11 when we invaded both Afghanistan and Iraq. Humans would rather “get even” than understand. The notion of “justice,” for the most part, comes in the form of bombs, courtrooms and prison sentences.

The world has also witnessed religion used as validation for waging violence. Dating back to the Crusades to the already mentioned 9/11, religion is frequently used to justify political gain and power in the name of God. It could also be said that “righteous indignation” feeds this call to violence. As an interfaith activist who has worked with and learned from people from every faith tradition and many indigenous traditions as well, I repeatedly encounter this ideological mindset – *My God is better than your God*. Interfaith peacebuilding is, in my opinion, one of the most effective ways to alleviate conflict, to bridge narratives that exacerbate conflict, and to better communities and nations. In all of my experiences and interactions, I have arrived at this place in my vocation where I see the need for more restorative justice approaches within interfaith peacebuilding.

I have grappled with the question of how we can break this seemingly all too normal cycle of revenge and retaliation and of how faith can play a positive role. How do we break the cycle of vengeance, retaliation and retribution, and instead seek restoration, reconciliation and compassionate forgiveness? Many refer to this process as Restorative Justice or, *RJ* for short. Wanda McCaslin defines RJ in her book, *Justice as Healing, Indigenous Ways*, as:

Restorative justice offers a philosophical and theoretical worldview for looking at crime and wrongdoing. The theoretical framework provides a way to organize how we think, feel and see. The restorative justice theory guides our processes and actions, while also helping us understand the processes by clarifying the concepts, principles, and values on which they are based. Restorative justice philosophy incorporates some core values and principles. It is a harm-centered and need-centered approach to a criminal act which is thought of as harm to ‘individuals, their property, their relationships, and their communities. It is inclusive and encourages the active participation of those who have direct interest ... Values such as accountability, open communication, caring, empathy, responsibility, fairness, respect, transformation, reparation/healing, and empowerment are key to the process. Moreover, restorative justice processes take into consideration the whole context of the crime.¹

This brings me to my ministry need and question: How can Restorative Justice be implemented within interfaith peace building to move humans away from the desire for retribution and instead, seek to restore ourselves, the community, and the world? My plan and answer to this question is: In order for interfaith peacebuilding to be more effective, an RJ component is needed. At this time, RJ and interfaith peacebuilding have not been combined in the way I envision. I have designed this component, which includes a practical tool-kit to Interfaith Peacebuilding for United Religions Initiative (URI) – the largest, grassroots, international, interfaith, peacebuilding organization in the world.

My experience with RJ started at Boston University School of Theology where I took a course that outlined what RJ is and isn't and how it is implemented, or not, within our justice system, individually and within Christianity, Judaism and Islam. My first introduction to someone who had gone through an RJ process was when I met and listened to a woman who chose an RJ approach with the men who murdered her son in a drug deal gone bad. There is a lot to this story, but in short because of an RJ process she found peace and now these men are out of prison, have families and jobs, and she has coffee with them once a year. She exchanges

¹ Wanda McCaslin, Ed., *Justice as Healing, Indigenous Ways* (St. Paul, MN: Living Justice Press, 2005), 298-299.

Christmas cards every year as well. I was struck by her grace. I was also struck by the men's ability to turn their lives around and I remember thinking – *If we could all practice this when we experience harm or cause harm, there would be less conflict in the world than there is now.*

This story ultimately taught me that without restoring our communities, as well as ourselves, peaceful outcomes are uncommon. If humans are naturally retaliatory, then there is a need to learn how to react in a different way, a restorative way – through compassion, empathy and understanding. From tutoring women in prison, to learning about the Maori in New Zealand and their culture of restorative justice processes, I have witnessed firsthand that RJ works.

When first discussing my project with some URI staff members in India, Nigeria and Ethiopia, I was told they have a deep need for a restorative justice process in their interfaith peacebuilding efforts to further their work. Many in their communities who have suffered conflict and transgressions get lost in the “old narratives.” Many are stifled and do not know how to exist peacefully and elders are often unreachable. My colleagues are hopeful that an RJ process will also engage the younger community members in their countries, breaking the stale narratives and the inability to move beyond past transgressions. RJ combined with interfaith peacebuilding offers the opportunity to have more of a reconciliatory, holistic process when dealing with conflict.

What I appreciate and feel is important to stress is that the concept of restoration is present within all religious traditions already. Be it through forgiveness, compassion, or the Golden Rule, all sacred scripture demands attention to peace, justice and the ability to treat others as you would have them treat you. This notion of coexistence is widely understood within the URI network. URI breaks itself into eight regions – North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, South East Asia, Asia, Middle East & North Africa, European, and Multi-Region (members from

all regions, cross collaborating). URI is at the cutting edge of interfaith peacebuilding and they are always looking for innovative and effective ways to engage their worldwide network.

While I am certain we can find multiple definitions of interfaith peacebuilding, at URI their mission is clear and their vision is a model for peacebuilding and reconciliation around the world. As noted in the Purpose section of the URI Charter, “The purpose of the United Religions Initiative is to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings.”²

With principles that encourage respect, recognizing the sacred in all beings and the earth, to listening and acting in an ethical manner, as well as practicing healing and restoration, the URI Preamble serves as an Interfaith Peacebuilding guide in and of itself:

We, people of diverse religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions throughout the world, hereby establish the United Religions Initiative to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings.

We respect the uniqueness of each tradition, and differences of practice or belief.

We value voices that respect others, and believe that sharing our values and wisdom can lead us to act for the good of all.

We believe that our religious, spiritual lives, rather than dividing us, guide us to build community and respect for one another.

Therefore, as interdependent people rooted in our traditions, we now unite for the benefit of our Earth community.

We unite to build cultures of peace and justice.

We unite to heal and protect the Earth.

We unite to build safe places for conflict resolution, healing and reconciliation.

² “URI Charter,” United Religions Initiative, Accessed November 27, 2020, <https://www.uri.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2017/URI-Charter-English.pdf>.

We unite to support freedom of religion and spiritual expression, and the rights of all individuals and peoples as set forth in international law.

We unite in responsible cooperative action to bring the wisdom and values of our religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions to bear on the economic, environmental, political and social challenges facing our Earth community.

We unite to provide a global opportunity for participation by all people, especially by those whose voices are not often heard.

We unite to celebrate the joy of blessings and the light of wisdom in both movement and stillness.

We unite to use our combined resources only for nonviolent, compassionate action, to awaken to our deepest truths, and to manifest love and justice among all life in our Earth community,³

Furthermore, URI's Principles are responsible, clear, gender balanced, pluralistic and culturally adaptable. These principles also acknowledge adversity and establish a grounded understanding of how interfaith peacebuilding is successfully implemented.

- 1. The URI is a bridge-building organization, not a religion.**
- 2. We respect the sacred wisdom of each religion, spiritual expression and indigenous tradition.**
- 3. We respect the differences among religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions.**
- 4. We encourage our members to deepen their roots in their own tradition.**
- 5. We listen and speak with respect to deepen mutual understanding and trust.**
- 6. We give and receive hospitality.**
- 7. We seek and welcome the gift of diversity and model practices that do not discriminate.**
- 8. We practice equitable participation of women and men in all aspects of the URI.**

³ United Religions Initiative, "URI Charter."

- 9. We practice healing and reconciliation to resolve conflict without resorting to violence.**
- 10. We act from sound ecological practices to protect and preserve the Earth for both present and future generations.**
- 11. We seek and offer cooperation with other interfaith efforts.**
- 12. We welcome as members all individuals, organizations and associations who subscribe to the Preamble, Purpose and Principles.**
- 13. We have the authority to make decisions at the most local level that includes all the relevant and affected parties.**
- 14. We have the right to organize in any manner, at any scale, in any area, and around any issue or activity which is relevant to and consistent with the Preamble, Purpose and Principles.**
- 15. Our deliberations and decisions shall be made at every level by bodies and methods that fairly represent the diversity of affected interests and are not dominated by any.**
- 16. We (each part of the URI) shall relinquish only such autonomy and resources as are essential to the pursuit of the Preamble, Purpose and Principles.**
- 17. We have the responsibility to develop financial and other resources to meet the needs of our part, and to share financial and other resources to help meet the needs of other parts.**
- 18. We maintain the highest standards of integrity and ethical conduct, prudent use of resources, and fair and accurate disclosure of information.**
- 19. We are committed to organizational learning and adaptation.**

20. We honor the richness and diversity of all languages and the right and responsibility of participants to translate and interpret the Charter, Articles, Bylaws and related documents in accordance with the Preamble, Purpose and Principles, and the spirit of the United Religions Initiative.

21. Members of the URI shall not be coerced to participate in any ritual or be proselytized.⁴

Honor, respect, learning, cooperation, welcoming, mutual understanding - all things that involve and are necessary in interfaith peacebuilding efforts. I feel Principle 9 is the most relevant principle that aligns with this project. *We practice healing and reconciliation to resolve conflict without resorting to violence.* This is literally the entire reason for this project - to reconcile and heal from conflict and to stop the cycle of violence. This is RJ.

Michael Hadley explains in his book, *The Spiritual Roots of Restorative Justice*, how the Western world has adopted RJ practices. “Restorative Justice began as isolated criminal-justice initiative based on reconciliation rather than retribution. Special justice initiatives throughout the world have drawn on traditions as diverse as that of Aboriginal spirituality, the Maori, the Jewish, and the Christian.”⁵ It is important to mention that RJ is present in every faith and cultural belief and this will be illustrated throughout the paper, as well as in the tool-kit.

RJ speaks to those of faith. Most of us who are part of a faith tradition are very invested in the notion of social justice and what that looks like in the many different facets of life. RJ utilized in an interfaith context is not necessarily new, but it is and can be difficult to apply within some faith and belief contexts. Within all faith traditions and all cases of conflict and harm, RJ is

⁴ United Religions Initiative, “URI Charter.”

⁵ Michael Hadley, ed., *The Spiritual Roots of Restorative Justice* (New York: State University NY, 2001), 9.

healing for all involved. Explained in its most simplistic form, “Restorative Justice can help reduce the level of pain so that healing may begin to take place, but it should never be forced on anyone. If it is embraced freely, it can have deep lasting effects on individuals and communities.”⁶

Some might wonder why the practice of RJ is important. Why not just stick with what we know, understand and practice, in regard to our normalized vision of justice. Why change our idea of justice? In truth, our view of justice does not allow for healing of either the survivor or the offender. Revenge, retribution and imprisonment are not healing. Restoration and healing involves accountability and the opportunity to understand why. Howard Zehr’s, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*, informs us why restoration is imperative to healing when he reminds us of our idea of what justice is.

In an oft-quoted passage from Christian and Jewish scripture, the Prophet Micah asks the question, ‘What does the Lord require?’ The answer begins with the phrase, ‘To do justice.’ But what does justice require? As we have seen, Western society’s answer has focused on making sure those who have offended, get what they deserve. Restorative Justice answers differently.⁷

It is impossible to pigeonhole RJ into one way of viewing the practice or of how to approach RJ concepts. Every instance of harm caused and trauma incurred has different outcomes. Is RJ a practice that can be applied to every injustice? When does one know when to utilize these concepts? Perhaps it is when great harm keeps resurfacing in ways that are imaginable and unimaginable. I would posit that RJ should be practiced whenever possible. It is my belief that RJ must be a way of being and it must become a way of life. For this to occur then the practice of RJ must be approached holistically, with an understanding of all the factors involved and why it is beneficial to our communities and nations.

⁶ Hadley, *The Spiritual Roots of Restorative Justice*, 10.

⁷ Howard Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice* (New York: Good Books, 2015), 399.

I believe that faith can and does play a major part in the successful implementation of RJ. Moreover, the roots of indigenous wisdom within the RJ framework must be acknowledged and understood as well. Race and ethnicity play a major role in conflict, oppression and injustice. Race and ethnicity can also play a role in healing conflicts. Addressing RJ practices while recognizing the indigenous roots of RJ is critical to understanding how race and social movements, as well as reconciliation models, function within these wisdom filled, indigenous communities. “Contemporary restorative justice arises alongside the historical backdrop of heightened international awareness that indigenous knowledge, grounded in an ecological ethos of interrelatedness and collaboration, have much to offer today’s fractured world.”⁸

It is my opinion that the Maori Indigenous community from New Zealand practices RJ with the authenticity needed to have lasting, positive outcomes to resolving conflict and harm. Many of the RJ practices we see in place around the world stem from the Maori tradition and community. This approach is ingrained within their community and is also integrated within the New Zealand criminal justice system. We will read more on this later, however it is important to note that the Maori’s practice of justice is almost always approached with reconciliation and restoration in mind. Nin Thomas helps us understand how the Maori broach harm and healing and why a restorative approach is imperative to their indigenous practices.

When people are able to see themselves as part of the fabric of life, when they are able to identify those to whom they are closely related, when they are able to see themselves as the present manifestation of a long and unbroken physical and spiritual process, then healing can begin. *Utu* (restoration of balance) may require physical and spiritual actions to be taken in order to initiate the healing process for the victim, so that harmony can be restored to the family and community.⁹

⁸ Fania E. Davis, *The Little Book of Race and Restorative Justice* (New York: Good Books, 2019), 327.

⁹ Nin Thomas, “Maori Justice – The Marae as a Forum for Justice,” in *Justice as Healing, Indigenous Ways*, ed. Wanda McCaslin (St. Paul, MN: Living Justice Press, 2005), 138.

While RJ is considered an alternative way to healing, I am aware that for women who have suffered horrific violence, RJ in its original form is not a viable option. In the tool-kit, there is a special component for women who have experienced indirect and direct harm, violence and trauma. This focuses on the restoration and healing of oneself. While this component will barely touch on this aspect of a full RJ approach, it is important to recognize the significance of the trauma that women, especially, face in ongoing conflicts and communal violence. As noted on page 27 of the tool-kit, healing within an RJ framework for women, focuses mostly upon imagining what restoration looks like for the women themselves. Several ideas and exercises are posited in this section, including challenging women with questions such as, *Do I Feel Genuine Compassion For Myself? Do I Trust Myself? Do I Genuinely Love Myself?* The hope is that this section will challenge women to search for self-forgiveness and self-compassion, since they most likely will never receive accountability from those who caused them harm.

As mentioned earlier, RJ is present within all religious traditions. What I have learned over the years however, is that faith communities are not necessarily attune to this. A personal example is when my daughter Katy, was a Junior at Sudbury High School, in Sudbury, Massachusetts.

In January 2007, Katy was home for first period and began receiving frantic texts asking if she was OK and where she was located in the school. Alerted that something was going on, we rushed to the TV and learned there had been a stabbing inside the school. Within an hour, we learned that a young Freshman, James Alenson, had been stabbed by a Junior, John Odgren. James was not the intentional target for John, even though John came to school that day with a knife wanting to kill someone. James happened to be in the bathroom at the wrong time. John

initiated an altercation, stabbed James, and James died from his injuries. Needless to say, this sent our sleepy town into a downward, hateful spiral.

John Odgren was a student who was bussed from another town because he has Asperger Syndrome. Within hours of the incident, parents were demanding that no students outside Sudbury be allowed to study at any of the schools in the town. Furthermore, John Odgren's parents received several threatening phone calls, including death threats. There were also calls that our schools be fortified with metal detectors, campus police, more supervision for "Special needs students," and other "safety" measures.

I felt the right thing to do was to reach out to both families and offer support. Unfortunately, the Alenson's left Sudbury that day and literally never returned. I then turned my attention to the Odgren family. When I reached out to my church family who also had kids at the high school to see if they would like to visit with John Odgren's parents, I heard, *"I am not ready for that."* *"Nope."* *"They don't deserve us reaching out to them."* *"Be careful. Where did John learn how to be that violent?"* I literally found one parent to accompany me out to the Odgren's home and she was not from a faith community.

That visit was not easy. It was awkward, painful and dizzying. John's parents really appreciated us visiting and stated that they were surprised, especially since they had received several threatening phone calls, as well as people driving by their home yelling obscenities. They were scared, they were mourning, they were in a state of shock, and they were ashamed. There is absolutely no excuse for what John did to James and the fact that James, just an innocent fifteen year old who died needlessly, is tragic beyond words. *Two* families lost their sons that day, in

very different ways. Each of their losses is real, painful and full of reckoning. John Odgren was eventually found guilty for first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison.¹⁰

A strong example of a faith community in the United States practicing restoration in the midst of unthinkable violence, loss and deep sorrow is the Amish Community. The shooting at the West Nickel Mines School in the Old Order Amish Community, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania occurred on October 2, 2006. That day, Charles Carl Roberts IV walked into the school, ordered all the boys to leave, took the girls hostage and after a standoff with law enforcement officers, Roberts shot eight out of ten girls. Five died and Roberts committed suicide in the schoolhouse as well.

Before news spread across the world of this tragic event, the Amish elders called on the younger Amish community to not harbor anger or seek revenge. “How did the Amish decide so quickly to extend forgiveness? That question brought laughter from some Amish people we interviewed,” writes Donald B. Kraybill in the book, *Amish Grace, How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy*.

‘You mean some people actually thought we got together to plan forgiveness? ... Forgiveness was a decided issue ... it’s just what we do as nonresistant people. It was spontaneous. It was automatic. It was not a new thing.’ Every Amish person we spoke to with agreed: forgiveness for Roberts and grace for his family had begun as spontaneous expressions of faith, not as mandates from the church.¹¹

Woven in to their very theology and culture, a little known fact is that two of the students that day loved their classmates, friends and community so much that they asked Roberts to kill them first. Sisters, Marian and Barbara Fisher aged 13 and 11, bargained with Roberts inside the

¹⁰ John R. Ellment, “SJC Upholds Murder Conviction of John Odgren who killed high school classmate in bathroom,” *Boston Globe*, September 4, 2019, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2019/09/04/sjc-upholds-murder-conviction-john-odgren-who-killed-high-school-classmate-bathroom/aV5lFiBTdCPonHx8cbR6xH/story.html>.

¹¹ Donald B. Kraybill, *Amish Grace, How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 49.

schoolhouse, asking him to shoot them first. They did this in the hope that others might be saved. When Roberts opened fire, they were the first to be shot. Barbara was severely wounded but survived and Marian died at the scene. Later that day, many of the parents who had injured children and some who had lost children, reached out to Roberts' widow with food and support. Several of those family members and others from the Amish community, attended Roberts' funeral later that week as well. There were more Amish at his funeral, than any other community or family members.

Many labeled these actions as *radical* and *unthinkable*. Many also recognized that these acts stemmed from the practices of reconciliation and forgiveness. However, these actions also illustrated the practice of restoration. Their actions taught us to think differently and illustrated a practice of compassion that lives out-loud and on purpose. They showed us how their theology and way of being in the world lends to a literal transformation of not only a tragic event, but of a community as well.

This transformative way of thinking is empowering. The Amish not only think this way, they live this way. This way of living is mindful, thoughtful and purposeful. It is a practice of being born in to and moving through the world in this way. Grace such as this is not a normal practice for most. The Amish allowed us to witness the way of restoration. Their actions were an example of how a community can turn an act of unthinkable violence, into an indelible reaction of altruism, reciprocity and transformation, in honor of and in the name of God. More, I believe this way of being enables the Amish to recognize the sacred in all beings.

What is important to recognize in the actions of the Amish is that they practiced restorative justice without Roberts present. They offered this gift of restoration to Roberts' memory, to his family and most importantly, to their community.

The restorative approach also recognizes another concrete, sociological fact: that the broken relationship caused by an offense can only be fully restored if those that are wronged are willing to *allow* the offender to take responsibility. Restoration of the offender, in other words, is pre-condition for full responsibility taking. And reconciliation with victims is often the pre-condition of full restoration. It is a mistake to defend Restorative Justice on the grounds that it chooses the values of mercy and forgiveness over justice ... It is much more accurate to say that forgiveness and reconciliation are critical aspects of restoration, and restoration is an important pre-condition, if not part of the very definition, of *justice*.¹²

Ultimately, I believe that there are several actions and philosophies that lead to successful outcomes within interfaith peacebuilding and restorative justice frameworks. Included in this paper are the philosophies of *Ubuntu* and *Ahimsa*, the Golden Rule, mindfulness, self-compassion, compassion for others, forgiveness, and the notion of reconciliation. I also believe that this process must hold respect, understanding, the reframing of narratives, listening, honest dialogue, and building emotional intelligence. All of this along with empathy, understanding the role of faith and belief, accountability, and the desire for healing, lead to the hope of transformation and peaceful coexistence.

The need for this type of interfaith peacebuilding and restorative justice approach is obvious. There are countless conflicts around the world, ongoing strife in our own communities and nations, as well as the lasting consequences of dire social conditions. These all hinder peaceful outcomes in many parts of the world. Political, theological and cultural ideologies and dogma are a definitive factor in the exacerbation of conflict and the demonization of “the other.” Living in a way that allows a vision that every human is sacred, is something I believe we can achieve. The next chapter will explore this and will illustrate the importance of recognizing the humanity in

¹² Conrad G. Brunk, *Restorative Justice and the Philosophical Theories of Criminal Punishment*, in *The Spiritual Roots of Restorative Justice*, ed. Michael Hadley (New York: State University NY, 2001), 48.

each and every one of us and how that enables restorative practices to thrive within the practice of interfaith peacebuilding.

Chapter 1

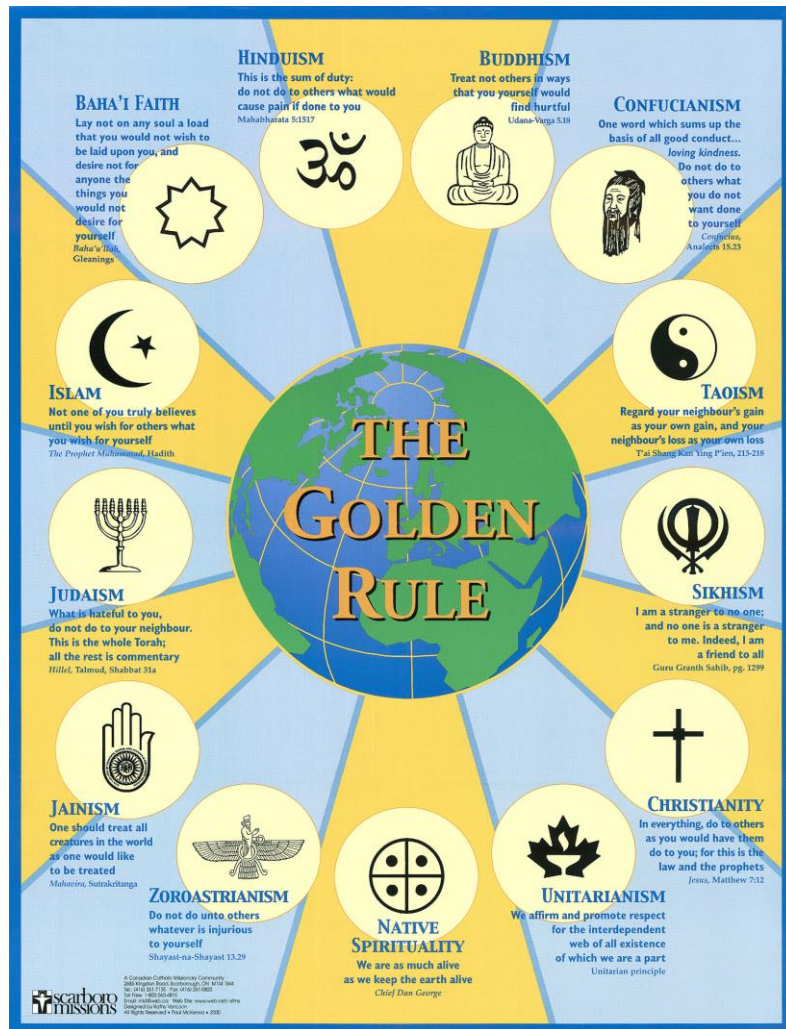
All Beings Are Sacred – Living into the Golden Rule

The Golden Rule serves as a reminder within all faith traditions to treat each other as we want to be and should be treated. I am afraid the reality of this philosophy is far from holistically practiced all the time, but I do believe it serves as a consistent reminder to be a better human. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, retribution and revenge are alive and well in the world where conflict has raged and is raging. Retribution is justified by the notion that if someone hurts others, they deserve to be hurt in return. The Golden Rule, in practice, negates retribution and instead advocates for reconciliatory behavior and actions.

Sometimes it feels as if humans are programmed to enact revenge because for us, that is our idea of *justice*. Retribution is learned. Although we are told in sacred texts to turn the other cheek, retaliation framed as justice is normative and condoned. At the same time we are reminded in our holy texts of the beauty of the Golden Rule and that it is represented in every major faith and belief. The Golden Rule calls us to think differently. Summarized best by Jeffrey Wattles in his book, *The Golden Rule*:

Whoever practices the Golden Rule opens himself or herself to a process of change. Letting go of self to identify with a single other individual, or with a third-person perspective on a complex situation, or with a divine paradigm, one allows a subtle and gradual transformation to proceed, a transformation with bright hope for the individual and the planet. The rule begins by setting forth the way the self wants to be treated as a standard of conduct; but by placing the other on a par with the self, the rule engages one in approximating a higher perspective from which the kinship of humanity is evident. To pursue this higher perspective is to risk encountering the divine and the realization that every step along the forward path is illumined by the Creator ... 'Do to others as you want others to do to you' is part of our planet's common language, shared by persons with differing but overlapping conceptions of morality. Only a principle so flexible can serve as a moral ladder for all humankind.¹³

¹³ Scarboro Missions, Understanding The Golden Rule, January 31, 2021, <https://www.scarboromissions.ca/golden-rule/understanding-the-golden-rule>.



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This poster of Golden Rule in all major faith and indigenous beliefs above is also included in the tool-kit. Viewing this poster illustrates the commonality of how the concept of the Golden Rule is interpreted across major traditions. A few that stand out to me are:

- **Bahá'í**, *Lay not on any soul a load that you would not wish to be laid upon you, and desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself.* Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings
- **Christianity**, *In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.* Jesus, Matthew 7:12

¹⁴ Scarboro Missions, Understanding the Golden Rule.

- **Confucianism**, *One word which sums up the basis of all good conduct....loving-kindness. Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself.* Confucius, Analects 15.23
- **Native Spirituality**, *We are as much alive as we keep the earth alive.* Chief Dan George
- **Unitarianism**, *We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.* Unitarian principle¹⁵

I believe that keeping the Golden Rule in mind when practicing RJ is one of the keys to acting with and living in a restorative way.

The root of the Golden Rule can be scrutinized and its true intention contemplated. Is it truly about not causing harm whatsoever? Or, is it reciprocal in nature? More, the questions that come to mind: *Are we taught to cause harm as part of our upbringing or is causing harm an innate behavior? Does character only relate to how one is raised?* Self-reflection and choice also define who we are and how we move through the world. If this is true, then compassionate responses are a choice. “The virtuous person and the vicious person both exercise reason because consciousness is reason rather than a detached, yet accessible moral nature humans happen to possess ... it is by our very nature as human beings that all of our feelings, thoughts, and desires are subjected to, and united by, our capacity to reason – this is what it is to be a self-conscious being.”¹⁶ Is it faith and religion that teach us how to behave and respond, or is it culture and community? Context is relative. Context is also relevant.

Another aspect of the Golden Rule is the conscious effort to practice this rule with a moral compass and ethical approach. Morals and ethics are questionable, as what is moral in one

¹⁵ Scarboro Missions, Thirteen Sacred Texts English Version, accessed January 31, 2021, <https://www.scarboromissions.ca/golden-rule/thirteen-sacred-texts-multi-lingual-versions/thirteen-sacred-texts-english-version>.

¹⁶ Wayne Justin Downs, “Immanuel Kant and T.H. Green on Emotions, Sympathy and Morality” (Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies, Texas A&M University, 2009), 67.

culture, might not be considered moral in another culture. The same can be said about ethics as well. There is an assumption however, that a person of faith acts from a moral and ethical place, that this is understood, and that people of faith strive to reach that ideal. Does morality stem from empathy? Also, does morality mean that we automatically recognize the humanity in each and every one of us?

Applying the Golden Rule to the practice of RJ should be easy. If we take the case of Amish school shooting, the Amish clearly responded with forgiveness and reconciliation based on their faith. It could also be argued that they responded out of a moral code or moral compass and that their morality is based on an ethical, empathetic, lived understanding. One could argue that the Amish clearly saw the humanity in the man who killed their children in their community that day and they illustrated this by their actions in the aftermath of the shooting. They literally treated Roberts' wife as they would have wanted Roberts to treat their children and their community.

Of all the major faith traditions of the world, I am struck how Zoroastrianism follows the principle of the Golden Rule as a major tenet of its faith. The Zoroastrian religion puts a strong emphasis on morals and ethics. In turn, a Zoroastrian is expected to be capable of making a conscious effort every moment of [their] life, to reject all forms of evil and lies in thought, word, and deed.¹⁷ Not only is the theology of the Golden Rule interwoven in Zoroastrianism, but the philosophical aspect is as well. This is important because it states that this is not about following a tenet of faith, but instead, holding a space for the practice of compassionate action. Perhaps even when not warranted.

The Golden Rule is a well-entrenched concept in Zoroastrian ethics. It has been advocated and practiced throughout the history of its moral philosophy, a history imbued with remarkable verve and vigor, and conveying a sense of realism and high seriousness to moral life. The very idea of a radical distinction between the good and the bad is an

¹⁷ Mahnaz Moazami, "The Golden Rule in Zoroastrianism," in *The Golden Rule The Ethics of Reciprocity in World Religions*, eds. Jacob Neusner and Bruce Chilton (London: Continuum, 2014), 66.

essential source of the vigor. The goal of Zoroastrian ethics is summed up in the triad of ‘good thought, good word, good action,’ and constitutes the foundation for faith. These virtues imply thinking and speaking about the world as an ordered cosmos created by the Good Spirit, performing the acts required to maintain this sense of equilibrium, and conducting a virtuous life by implementing truth, purity, the right measure, and God-given order.¹⁸

Similar to Zoroastrian belief, within Islam, forgiveness and wholeness are stressed throughout the *Qur’an* and maintains the message that Allah is a Being of compassion and mercy for all of humanity.

Every human being has a covenant with God to believe in Him and to do what is right, and God has sent prophets and scripture to guide humanity to correct belief and proper behavior. Therefore, the *Qur’an* urges people to be mindful of the fact that while they are free to believe and do as they like, the standards of judgment belong to God. Interpreted in this light, Muhammad’s statement of the Golden Rule is a call to self-examination and religious transformation aimed not at reciprocity so much as humility by acknowledging the humanity of other human beings.¹⁹

One could argue that every human is sacred, because every faith tradition has a practice of the Golden Rule in one way or another. Therefore we are to honor every human, in every way possible. In the Jain Sutras, this is expressed eloquently:

As I feel every pain and agony from depth, down to the pulling out of a hair – in the same way, be sure of this, all other living beings feel the same pain and agony as I, when they are ill-treated in the same way. For this reason no living being should be beaten, treated with violence, abused, tormented, or deprived of life.²⁰

I appreciate that Jains practice respect for all living, sentient beings, including animals, bugs and plant life. I can attest to this, as my first trip to India I noted two Jain Monks, naked, walking down the street, carefully sweeping everything in front of them, as they made their way down the sidewalk. They did this so when they took their next step, they caused no harm to any living

¹⁸ Moazami, “The Golden Rule in Zoroastrianism,” 65.

¹⁹ Th. Emil Homerin, “The Golden Rule in Islam,” in *The Golden Rule The Ethics of Reciprocity in World Religions*, eds. Jacob Neusner and Bruce Chilton (London: Continuum, 2014), 100-101.

²⁰ Harry Gensler, *Ethics and the Golden Rule* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 43.

being, even the smallest, microscopic bug. I would posit that RJ in its most pure form is a practice that *no living being should be beaten, treated with violence, abused, tormented, or deprived of life*. The very act of restoration centers around not only how you treat others but, as we will read in Chapter 4, how you treat yourself. Jainism and Islam, much like restorative justice, seeks to heal all life with mindful actions and reactions.

Buddhism teaches karma within the Golden Rule in that the good or evil we do to others will come back to us, now or in a future life. Its five precepts forbid killing or harming sentient beings, stealing, adultery, lying, and intoxicating drinks and drugs. Buddhism also teaches the Golden Rule as, “Look where you will, there is nothing dearer to man than himself; therefore, as it is the same thing that is dear to you and to others, hurt not others with what pains yourself. (N. Canon Dhammapada).”²¹

Applying all of these notions of the Golden Rule to interfaith peacebuilding and RJ should be easy to practice. If it is written in sacred texts then it carries validity, a force behind it, and a context of its own. Yet, what we find many times in the peacebuilding process is that texts are seen as outdated, too contradictory, or at odds with other traditions. My argument is that within sacred texts, the Golden Rule exists and it quite simply can and should be used to further peacebuilding efforts.

In the context of faith we understand that The Golden Rule is to create a kinder, more compassionate world. In the larger picture, I think the Golden Rule instigates hope. The hope that humans recognize the sacredness of all individuals and that we always, no matter what, act with grace and understanding. In a perfect world this scenario is plausible. In reality, when someone has been harmed, they normally seek revenge. This only perpetuates negative feelings

²¹ Gensler, *Ethics and the Golden Rule*, 53.

and exacerbates conflict and is, as referenced in the Introduction, a norm. Reacting and thinking in a different way such as what the Golden Rule teaches us, is transformative. “Treating others as bad as they treat us (revenge) divides people; it brings violence and inner torment. Being forgiving and non-violent to others, as we want them to be to us, unites people; it brings inner peace and serenity.”²²

Founding URI member Mussie Hailu, is a prominent Ambassador for interfaith collaboration in Ethiopia and he is also the Founder of the United Nations *Golden Rule Day*. First initiated in Ethiopia only, the United Nations recognized Hailu’s efforts and then officially created April 5 as *International Golden Rule Day*. In Ethiopia, a country that is currently grappling with more violence on a daily basis, the notion and practice of the Golden Rule is imperative at this time and more important than ever. As Gensler writes of Hailu, “He sees the Golden Rule as a path to peace, justice and interfaith understanding.”²³ I know Mussie personally and I can say that his way of being, how he walks, talks, and acts, is as if he is living out the Golden Rule in his everyday life. Mussie understands the reality of what humans can do to each other. He also sees the human potential that the Golden Rule can inspire.

The URI network uses and practices the Golden Rule in their peacebuilding efforts frequently. With Hailu’s efforts, the yearly Golden Rule Day encompasses several aspects of teaching about the importance of the Golden Rule with events and workshops. In 2019, now retired Executive Director, Reverend Victor Kazanjian, made a video for *Golden Rule Day*, where he stated in part:

The Golden Rule is the thread that binds us, one to another. It is a principle shared by people of all traditions in the world. Emerging from our different beliefs, inviting us into a common way of being in the world, one that deeply respects and honors the beauty of each other. A way of seeing and being that ensures peaceful coexistence. There is much

²² Gensler, *Ethics and the Golden Rule*, 52.

²³ Gensler, *Ethics and the Golden Rule*, 56.

at work in our world these days that is intended to divide us – separate us – along different lines of identity. And many who use rhetoric that dehumanizes people different from themselves and legitimizes their abuse. The Golden Rule exposes such rhetoric and the hateful actions it inspires, as inhumane and opposed to the spiritual values which hold all humanity, all life, as sacred. At URI, we live by the Golden Rule in that we respect the sacred wisdom of all traditions – respecting differences – and discovering the common thread that binds us, one to another. Sisters and Brothers, as we commit ourselves to living out the Golden Rule in our daily lives, may the power of our convictions infuse purpose into our actions that we may be part of extending peace to this precious planet and its beloved inhabitants.²⁴

Reverend Kazanjian highlights exactly what is conveyed in this chapter, that all humans are sacred and deserve respect. He emphasizes that the Golden Rule enables us to not only recognize and reflect on this, he reminds us of how important it is to treat each other with kindness.

Kazanjian expertly weaves this into the practice of interfaith peacebuilding, saying that there is wisdom in every faith tradition. The motivation behind violence in religion's name will never be the answer to achieve peaceful coexistence. Furthermore, Reverend Kazanjian reminds us of the impact that rhetoric and conflict have on us and how without practicing the Golden Rule, we will continue to repeat the same mistakes again and again.

Finally, it should be noted that there are several Humanists, Atheists and Agnostics that are a part of the URI network. This is not only relevant to the reality of true and grounded interfaith peacebuilding worldwide, but to the fact that if we truly are going to view all humans as sacred, this includes everyone, regardless of where they stand religiously or spiritually. There is a myth that without God or some sort of belief system that one has no morals. I disagree with this. One can easily find on the American Humanist Association's website, plenty of material that clearly illustrates a moral and ethical grounding.

Humanism is a democratic and ethical lifestance which affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives. It stands for the building of a more humane society through an ethics based on human and other natural

²⁴ "URI Golden Rule Day," United Religions Initiative, Youtube Video, Golden Rule Day, April 3, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMhB5YKIhdQ&feature=youtu.be>.

values in a spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities. It is not theistic, and it does not accept supernatural views of reality.²⁵

As we will learn in the next chapter, many times conflict and violence continue due to existing narratives that are passed down from generation to generation. Part of those narratives derive from a moral and ethical stance and are, many times, driven by foundational religious belief systems. One could argue that faith and belief stem from a moral higher ground. If this were the case, then we would see less harm caused in the name of religion. It is important that we recognize all who are not only a part of the URI network as sacred, but every human being on the planet as sacred. I believe that if all truly recognized the sacred in all humans, that this would lead to the understanding and recognition that all beings are sacred, as is our planet. This is the work of a peacebuilder.

In the next chapter, by exploring the ideology in how trauma thrives through generations and through narratives that exacerbate hatred, anger and conflict, I posit that unless we holistically seek justice by peaceful means, we will continue to act on those existing narratives that inhibit restoration and the peaceful transformation of our communities.

²⁵ “Definition of Humanism,” American Humanist Association, accessed April 1, 2021, <https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/definition-of-humanism/>.

Chapter 2

Why Conflict Continues – Existing Narratives and the Importance of Emotional Intelligence

Truly grasping conflict and violence requires understanding that most conflicts, wars and violence are exacerbated by already existing tension in the community. We can surmise from the past and present that humans cannot and do not let go of past aggressions. Therefore, humans anger easily and resort to retributive actions naturally. Conflict then continues and is triggered by the communal understanding of retribution. Protracted conflicts such as Israel and Palestine, as well as the threat of continued communal violence in India between Hindus and Muslims, are both examples of tenuous situations. What comes with this reality is that these ongoing conflicts contribute to continued misunderstanding, hatred, intolerance, as well as maintain the threat of ongoing violence. Protracted conflicts create the need for ongoing discussion and evaluation.

There is not yet a commonly accepted international definition of what constitutes a protracted conflict, or how long a conflict has to last to become ‘protracted.’ The phrase emerged in the 1970s in the work of the Lebanese professor, Edward Azar, who distinguished protracted social conflicts by their intractability and longevity – the former characteristic being responsible for the latter.²⁶

The time I spent in the West Bank and Israel helped me understand that conflict is experienced by everyone and in every way. The fear and emotions that stem from ongoing conflict are not only experienced through violent recurring incidences, but also from storytelling and historical narratives. While in Hebron, a city that has been greatly impacted by Israeli Settlers, there are barricades throughout the city that are hip-high and separate the Settlers’ and the Palestinian’s pathways. As an “International,” I could walk on either side. One day, I witnessed Israeli kids on one side of the barrier and Palestinian kids on the other side. All

²⁶ “Protracted Conflict and Humanitarian Action,” International Committee of the Red Cross, accessed October 20, 2020, https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/document/file_list/protracted_conflict_and_humanitarian_action_i_crc_report_lr_29.08.16.pdf.

between the ages of ten and around fifteen, they were not even four feet away from one another, screaming at each other, in both Arabic and Hebrew. Neither side had any idea what the other was saying, but they certainly felt the hatred and the sentiment of disdain from the dehumanization that has been taught and retaught since birth. I recall one young girl recoiling and literally shielding herself from the words that were hurled and one child ran away and hid behind me. After they passed each other, everything returned to “normal,” as if this was just a regular part of their day. I recall looking at all the adults in the vicinity. It was almost as if they did not care and were so accustomed to it, there was no need to act. There definitely was a feeling of acceptable reality.

I will never forget that experience for it taught me that this type of conflict might never end. The hate, anger and lasting implications of a conflict that has existed for thousands of years, will continue due to the violence, fear and ideology passed down from generation to generation. I walked away knowing that there are people who would never experience a life without hatred and violence in this region. All of the children of Hebron simply know no other way of being.

How do conflicts such as this inhibit reconciliation and healing? I believe there is much more to ongoing conflict and violence than what we see in plain sight. I believe that conflict is not only exacerbated by narratives, but I also believe that fear from ongoing violence is passed down by the telling of stories over and over again. The mind can be altered by fear and repetitive stories as well. I also believe the emotional intelligence of those who have suffered ongoing conflict and violence is greatly affected. We see this not only in certain areas of the world, but right here in the United States as well.

Although this chapter cannot fully explore how the epigenetic factor may play a role in ongoing conflict, recent studies on how epigenetics can and do contribute to ongoing conflict is

worth a quick mention. I often wonder if this factor, combined with a low emotional intelligence is why conflict and violence repeat across generations. If a group, community and country are feeling angry and have unaddressed harm, trauma or conflict that is continuous, they may maintain a sense of victimhood, as well as the desired notion for revenge. Emotions and reactions on a personal, community, statewide and international level matter. Without grounded thought processes, conflict can and does continue. “About 2300 years ago Aristotle observed that emotions may be felt both too much and too little, and in both cases not well; but to feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, toward the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way, is what is both intermediate and best, and this is characteristic of virtue.”²⁷

Epigenetics is the study of how trauma and harm are both passed down from generation to generation by being transferred on to the genes of the descendants of those who first experienced harm.

The brain is a very specialized organ endowed with the unique ability to respond to the environment, reshaping its connections according to what it has experienced. How the brain develops is influenced not only by the relatively stable in utero environment but, more importantly, by its extended postnatal growth and development, lasting some twenty years in humans during a time of instability in an ever-changing social environment. Since the making and consolidation of neural connections is activity dependent, the kind of environment that creates this activity has an impact on the connections and their consolidation of strengths through epigenetic regulation of gene transcription.²⁸

One can imagine that living with ongoing conflict or violence, or having grandparents or parents that experienced violence and harm, that the stories of terror and trauma are passed down to future generations. I do not believe this happens to cause those descendants harm, but instead to warn them, help them understand how conflict ravages humanity, and serves as a life lesson to

²⁷ Moshe Zeidner, *What We Know about Emotional Intelligence: How It Affects Learning, Work, Relationships, and Our Mental Health* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 58.

²⁸ James F. Leckman, Ed. *Pathways to Peace: The Transformative Power of Children and Families* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014), 26.

not let it happen in the generations to come. However, as studies have shown, it is clear that perhaps the trauma experienced is not just passed down through narratives and storytelling, but also imprinted on the genes of future family members.

This dependence on adaptive epigenetic changes for normal brain development may also produce dysfunction if the environment is chronically stressful ... Most of these experiences are transient and readily overcome. Others are more durable, especially those which are a consequence of warfare at the time of brain development, and which are subject to epigenetic modification.”²⁹

I think this is clear in the case of Israel and Palestine. The trauma and violence experienced on all sides of this conflict must effect brain development of those born in this region of the world. As my experience illustrated, those children hated each other and most likely will one day stop using their words and result to violence instead.

Is it memory, stories, lies, truths, anger and fear that hinder peacebuilding efforts? The unspoken reality of war, violence and conflict is that many times we are all somehow complicit. I think this is why narratives change and accountability shifts. One could say that retribution is warranted; *they attacked first*. However, many times that retributive act is ten times worse than the original act. Also, war and conflict are chaotic. Really discovering who did what to whom, many times is a guessing game. Chris Hedges writes of this in his book, *War Is a Force that Gives Us Meaning*.

There probably can never be full recovery of memory, but in order to escape the miasma of war there must be some partial rehabilitation, some recognition of the denial and perversion, some new way given to speak that lays bare the myth as fantasy and the cause as bankrupt. The whole truth may finally be too hard to utter, but the process of healing only begins when we are able to at least acknowledge the tragedy and accept our share of the blame.³⁰

²⁹ Leckman, *Pathways to Peace: The Transformative Power of Children and Families*, 57.

³⁰ Chris Hedges, *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* (New York: Public Affairs, 2014), 141.

Probably the largest group of trauma descendants that live with existing narratives that exacerbate conflict, are children and grandchildren of those who lived through the holocaust. We can see this play out in Israeli governmental policy, Jewish Settlement and Outpost activity, as well as in familial settings. Holocaust narratives and stories play a role in the fear that it could happen again, as well as the real worry and reality of antisemitism. There is a very real and indescribable feeling of terror and fear that descendants of the holocaust experience. It is said that not only narratives play a role in this transference, but religious rituals enforce emotional trauma transmission as well.

The findings on the persistence of Jewish rituals among observant as well as non-observant survivors suggest that, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, ritual practice was one means by which the emotional trauma of the catastrophe was conveyed to the next generation. Along with the telling of atrocity narratives and/or the feeling-laden silences that were pervasive in the postwar family culture, the practice of ritual established a separate but compelling emotional space wherein descendants were witness to the survivors' suffering and rage and wherein the emotional boundaries across generations, especially between survivors and the first generation of descendants, became blurred within a ritualized context of Jewish observance. Thus, as an important site of emotional exchange, the significance of ritual for the intergenerational transmission of trauma can, in part, be explained through the paradigm of self-in-relation theory.³¹

Several URI staff members working in India and Africa have told me that this is what they encounter in those they are working with on peacebuilding efforts. The emotional trauma that is passed down and transferred, leads to existing narratives that continue to exacerbate community strife. If we examine areas of conflict around the world, we can note the obvious signs of trauma relived over and over again and how this debilitates peacebuilding efforts. It is very important to recognize that all conflicts are affected by culture, generational attitudes, social conditions, as well as the stage of development and infrastructure in the region that is experiencing conflict.

While the Holocaust provides a model for recognizing and establishing a field of study for the investigation into intergenerational phenomena, the more recent conflicts in

³¹ Janet Jacobs, *The Holocaust Across Generations: Trauma and Its Inheritance Among Descendants of Survivors* (New York: NYU Press, 2017), 49.

Europe and Africa require a different sociological lens through which to analyze and consider the ways in which trauma is passed down from one generation to the next and the social meanings of this process. Future studies must therefore look to the social environment of postgenocide nations to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the social relations of victim/perpetrator coexistence and the effects of sexual violence on descendants who bear both the psychological scars of a parent's suffering and the isolation and alienation of children born of genocidal rape. As warfare and genocide continue to produce survivors of atrocity and incomprehensible loss, the children and grandchildren of traumatized populations will continue to bear the pain and suffering of their families' pasts.³²

I experienced another part of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict while in Sderot, Israel in 2009.

One could safely say that the whole town is literally a giant bomb shelter. Everywhere you go there is a bomb shelter: the market, the bus stops and the giant Caterpillar that kids can run into to take cover on the playground. Every home has a bomb shelter and every school, theatre and public building is fortified to withstand a Qassam missile from nearby Gaza. When I was there, missiles were launched often, almost one every day, but the city of Sderot was ready. I could not help but feel their fortification and shelters were a bit excessive, but I also do not live there. However, the extreme reaction spoke to me more.

I experienced a *Color Red*³³ while I was eating lunch one day, which helped me understand the heaviness of living in a protracted conflict zone. I recall the siren and the voice in Hebrew saying, "Tseva adom, tseva adom (Color red, color red)." This alarm is a fifteen-second warning to get to shelter. I recall forks dropping, the sound of chairs scraping on the cement as people pushed away from their tables to get up and run. I recall people scrambling. We did not have time to get to the nearby bus shelter that was fortified, so everyone ran to the back of the restaurant, which was not fortified. I recall thinking, *Well if it hits here, we're done*. Then the 15

³² Jacobs, *The Holocaust Across Generations: Trauma and Its Inheritance Among Descendants of Survivors*, 158.

³³ Marc S. Klein, "'Color red!' warning a way of life for besieged Sderot residents," JUF News, August 28, 2007, https://www.juf.org/news/media_mission.aspx?id=25738.

seconds to get to shelter was over and we waited. People were calling family. Some stood and prayed. All of us were just waiting - staring at each other, toward the door, up at the ceiling, as if expecting the missile to come through at any moment. Then we heard it hit some distance away. The all clear was announced and we went back to our table. As I walked out, two older Israeli gentlemen were still sitting at their table and nodded at me as I sat back down and pulled in my chair to finish my lunch. They chose not to move, probably will never move and they seemed accept whatever fate is gifted to them. I understood their defiance as a way of life.

Recognizing that conflict has changed over the years and is much more involved is imperative to understanding how to navigate it, especially in regard to emotions and mental well-being. This is addressed in the *Negotiation Journal* in the entry, '*Conflict Intelligence and Systemic Wisdom: Meta-Competencies for Engaging Conflict in a Complex, Dynamic World.*' This article engages those of us working on issues of peace and conflict. The idea of resolving conflict worldwide and here in the US, politically and in other frameworks, is not the same as several years ago. There are many more actors and negotiators that simply are not prepared, nor do they have the education, knowledge or capacity to address all the factors involved.

In 2016, Jean Marie Guehenno, president of the International Crisis Group, noted that the world is experiencing seismic geopolitical shifts from United States hegemony and bilateralism, through multilateralism, to a new 'crisis of complexity.' In this new order, an assortment of legitimate and illegitimate nonstate actors - including nongovernmental organizations, corporations, billionaires, computer hackers, social entrepreneurs, and terrorist groups - wield more power in the political realm than ever before ... Guehenno argued that the international conflict resolution thinking, policies, practices, and institutions have yet to catch up to this new reality, and are therefore rapidly becoming ineffectual and obsolete.³⁴

I noted these types of actors on many levels while in the Middle East, especially with the many individuals and groups that are active in demonstrations across the region. I felt their

³⁴ Peter T. Coleman, "Conflict Intelligence and Systemic Wisdom: Meta-Competencies for Engaging Conflict in a Complex, Dynamic World," *Negotiation Journal* Issue 1, (Jan 2018): 8.

presence only hindered the peacebuilding process, as their understanding of the conflict is on a very vapid and superficial level. On January 6, 2021, we also witnessed how very true this is, as Christian Right extremists and domestic terrorists stormed the US Capital. America now has a new understanding of how all aspects of conflict resolution, as well as understanding religiously motivated violence, must catch up to this new reality.

Many of the challenging large-scale domestic disputes in the United States today reflect similar trends, including developments in technology and social media, changes in the politicization of news media, and population diversification. A recent study of sixty leaders across various sectors found that one of their most commonly expressed concerns was the feeling of being overwhelmed by multiple, intense pressures and the proliferation of unthinkable events that challenge their basic capacities to lead. As rising patterns of institutional distrust, political polarization, ethnic fragmentation, and intergroup violence indicate, it has never been more vital to learn to navigate complexity and conflict constructively.³⁵

It is obvious to me that within this conflicted and violent cycle the world is experiencing at this time in history, assessing conflict needs a high emotionally intelligent response. As referenced above, humans for the most part are retributive and humans seek revenge before understanding. Americans were clearly adept to this notion after 9/11. Nowhere did we seek understanding of why we were attacked and in fact, within hours, Muslims and others from several different faith traditions were attacked in revengeful hate crimes. The first hate crime that resulted in a death post 9/11 was Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh man in Arizona. Rana Sodhi, Balbir's brother, is a friend of mine. In contrast to the hate crime that ripped apart his family, Rana is now an interfaith activist who works to build bridges and understanding.³⁶ We met in Salt Lake City at the Parliament of the World's Religions and it was there that Rana told his story of how seeking revenge for his brother's death would do nothing. Opening a door to build

³⁵ Coleman, "Conflict Intelligence and Systemic Wisdom," 7.

³⁶ "Remembering Balbir Singh Sodhi, Sikh Man Killed in Post-9/11 Hate Crime," StoryCorps, accessed March 27, 2021, <https://storycorps.org/stories/remembering-balbir-singh-sodhi-sikh-man-killed-in-post-911-hate-crime/>.

bridges and create better communities is the reward he welcomes. Unfortunately, Rana is a human anomaly because not even a month after 9/11, the United States launched a full, retaliatory war that the United States is still involved in almost twenty years later. I have often wondered had we sought a peaceful resolution and actions such as Rana did, where the world would be now. I also attribute Rana's actions to a high emotional intelligence and the ability to understand how his emotions can be used for good, instead of harm.

How does one who has suffered an injustice build emotional intelligence? Is it mind over matter? If emotional intelligence was incorporated more into the practice of peacebuilding, we would have more incidences of lasting peaceful coexistence. We all understand and know that there will always be conflict. However, if we reframe and restructure our minds from what we are taught from birth, I believe we can choose different paths that involve healing, rather than harming. Seeking revenge and retribution are choices. Instead, there must be alternatives that offer options for conversations, as well as thoughtful responses and inquiry. Anger that can and does lead to harm are responses to inner conflict in each and every one of us that manifests outside of us, growing, crossing oceans and countries, seeking some sort of *justice* for the wrong that has been perpetrated.

Throughout Western history, a deep divide has existed between reason and emotion, action and passion. In the words of Blaise Pascal—the great seventeenth-century mathematician and sometime mystic—“the heart has its reasons, which reason does not know.” The concept of emotional intelligence bridges that divide, allowing intelligence to be viewed from the perspective of emotion and emotion from the perspective of intelligence, and our understanding of each is enriched in the process.³⁷

Reacting to violence or conflict with emotional intelligent also leads to the intriguing practice of “conflict intelligence.” Can conflict intelligence be applied in small, large, international and to

³⁷ Zeidner, *What We Know about Emotional Intelligence: How It Affects Learning, Work, Relationships, and Our Mental Health*, 23.

political settings? I hope one day to witness that our children learn and practice emotional intelligence with a deep understanding of how existing narratives exacerbate conflict and how restorative practices can heal. If we can teach our children these holistic approaches to conflict, I see a better, more peaceful world. Imagine a world where another 9/11 type attack occurs and instead of reacting with retaliation, revenge and a twenty-year war, the nation attacked does everything to understand how past aggressions played a role in the disastrous event. Instead of retaliation, they would seek to restore their nation while holding those responsible, accountable. Finally, they would do this in a way that would not involve invasions, bombs and collateral damage.

Emotional and Conflict Intelligence must begin with each and every one of us on a personal level and then expand out into our communities. Because when one person with power has the ability to assess their anger and not channel it to cause harm to others, that lesson is sent out into the universe for others to emulate.

The first component of conflict intelligence is the awareness of and ability to regulate one's own conflict orientation, the usually consistent complex of cognitive, motivational, moral, and action orientations to conflict situations that guide one's conflict behaviors and responses. In addition to awareness about our own orientations, however, conflict intelligence requires adequate self-regulation in conflict, or the ability to inhibit impulsive, automatic, or 'hot' emotional responses to conflict. The anxiety and threat inherent to conflict often trigger our 'hot' emotional arousal system and move us away from the 'cool' contemplative, cognitive system associated with more effective modes of problem solving.³⁸

Addressing conflict and retaliation by calmly assessing the consequences of what a destructive or violent reaction would cause, is far from most people's minds when experiencing an injustice. The hope is to engage in effective, peaceful and just conflict resolution, individually

³⁸ Zeidner, *What We Know about Emotional Intelligence: How It Affects Learning, Work, Relationships, and Our Mental Health*, 25.

as well as collectively. If countries are led by war-mongers who have limited emotional and conflict intelligence, wars and violence will continue.

A more advanced core competency of conflict intelligence is the ability to respond optimally in conflict by navigating between different or competing motives and emotions and by combining different approaches to conflict to achieve desired outcomes. Rather than privileging one seemingly contradictory goal over another (cooperating over competing, self-interest over group interest, escalation over de-escalation) or one approach over another (integrative negotiation over distributive bargaining, domination over conciliation), an optimality approach recognizes that these opposing forces can at times function optimally when combined simultaneously or iteratively over time. This has many specific components, but here I emphasize three: establishing emotional optimality, managing tension escalation and deescalation, and combining contradictory behaviors optimally.³⁹

One could argue that emotional and conflict intelligence are very much the same thing. Both are desirable traits in addressing issues holistically in regard to war, conflict and violence.

While not everyone would agree with me, an excellent example of stable political and moral leadership, as well as an emotionally intelligent and restorative response to violence, stems from the mass shooting in Christchurch, New Zealand. With the death of fifty-one people who were attending Jummah at two separate mosques, Brenton Harrison Tarrant Facebook live-streamed his attack on innocent Muslims on March 15, 2019. In the days that followed, New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern chose a restorative approach to this horrific attack. A response that exhibits emotional and conflict intelligence, as well as an understanding of how to not react revengefully, Ardern chose reconciliation. As mentioned earlier, restorative justice is a very modern and pro-active practice in New Zealand, stemming from the indigenous Maori community. This response was expected, it was all awe inspiring and incredibly commendable. New Zealand's response was a lesson for us all. Ardern not only responded with political

³⁹ Zeidner, *What We Know about Emotional Intelligence: How It Affects Learning, Work, Relationships, and Our Mental Health*, 27

correctness, but as Professor Chris Marshall wrote in a blog entitled, *Restorative Politics and the Christchurch Massacre*,

I have been particularly struck by the weight of commentary devoted to the extraordinary moral leadership displayed by our Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern. Many have described her response as ‘pitch perfect,’ and noted the way she is being hailed around the world as a beacon of hope for a new kind of political leadership. In an international arena increasingly dominated by thugs, bullies and strongmen, Jacinda Ardern has provided a masterclass in what I call ‘compassionate justice.’⁴⁰

Because of Ardern’s response, most Kiwis responded in kind. It can be said that because Ardern responded with compassion and sought understanding, but also held Tarrant accountable, that this type of response spread throughout the country like a healthy contagion. It could also be said that due to the nature of New Zealander’s and of Maori roots that utilize the concept of restorative justice in everyday life, reacting as the community did, was natural. Either way, this reaction is foreign to most of the world, for retribution would be the first thing on most people’s minds and hearts.

Although New Zealand has a vast history of marginalization, for the most part it is a non-violent, peaceful country with a very low crime rate. This requires diligence, a certain mindset and love. In another beautiful op-ed on Ardern, Ghassan Hage wrote a piece for The Guardian entitled, *You can’t copy love: Why other politicians fall short of Jacinda Ardern*. It could very well be that Ardern’s gender plays a role in this remarkable response and it could also be because she simply has a high emotional intelligence and uses that in her leadership. Hage writes that the attack on Christchurch was not just about the attack itself, but about all the existing factors around white nationalism and racism. He praises Ardern’s coherent understanding of the situation and notes that without her knowledge, things could have been much different.

⁴⁰ “Restorative Politics and the Christchurch Massacre,” Restorative Community of Aotearoa New Zealand, Accessed November 2, 2020, <https://www.restorativecommunity.org.nz/blog/restorative-politics-and-the-christchurch-massacre>.

This is why dealing with the effect of structural racism – a racism that has unleashed, and is continuing to unleash, its disintegrative effects on people and society – is such a difficult endeavor. It requires more than cosmetic notions of ‘closing gaps.’ It requires a fundamental and sustained politics of restoration that unleashes all the possible economic, practical and affective centrifugal forces to counter the corrosive effects of the disintegrative politics that has prevailed for so long. But, as importantly, it also requires a special kind of love. While love on its own leads us nowhere, a restorative politics is not complete without it being permeated by a deeply felt love, a love that can cross rather than erect cultural boundaries and that can heal rather than entrench divisions. It is in this regard that Jacinda Ardern’s restorative politics is so crucial.⁴¹

In the weeks following the shooting, Ardern illustrated her solidarity for the Muslim community. From wearing a Hijab for the country’s Day of Mourning and Recognition, to the Call to Prayer played in every city and town around the country. These simple, yet meaningful gestures are important and they convey caring, an understanding and the ability to connect. This holistic approach ensures a restorative response for all. With her actions, Ardern instilled restoration on the hearts and minds of *Kiwis*.

It is important to note that Ardern not only advocated for a healthy approach to bring healing to not only the Muslim community in New Zealand, but that New Zealander’s showed their solidarity as well. An incredibly moving moment is of a young Maori man who went to the mosque and performed the *Haka* – a Maori traditional ‘war dance.’ The *Haka* is performed to show honor and respect. Many times the Haka is performed by a group. This was one male, dressed in western clothing, obviously moved by the events and wanted to show his love and respect for the Muslim community and those that died. This video portrays such passion and love, from one indigenous community and individual, to a faith community, in the country that they share.

⁴¹ Ghassan Hage, “You can’t copy love: Why other politicians fall short of Jacinda Ardern,” *The Guardian*, March 25, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/26/the-difficult-love-of-jacinda-ardern-cannot-be-easily-emulated-not-by-white-australian-culture-loving-itself>.

The beginning of the haka is a *Mihi*, or *Salutation*, as follows:

He haka karakia tēnei mō ngā mate
This is a haka praying for the deceased

Tino mamae tōku ngākau
My heart is overwhelmed with grief

He tū aroha tēnei mō te whānau o Aotearoa
So this is a symbol of love and compassion for the people of Aotearoa

The rest of the haka is the famous haka of Te Rauparaha 'Ka mate', as follows:

Kikiki kakaka!
Kikiki kakaka kau ana!
Kei waniwania taku aro,
Kei tara wahia kei te rua i te kerokero!
He pouna rahui te uira ka rarapa;
Ketekete kau ana, to peru kairiri:
Mau au e koro e.
*I'm jabbering and quivering,
stuttering, shaking and naked!
I'm brushed by your body
your formed curves, pulsating with energy!
Forbidden mysteries are revealed;
banter and closeness, flushed looks:
I am caught in a trap.*

Ka wehi au ka matakana.
Ko wai te tangata kia rere ure
Tirohanga nga rua rerarera,
Nga rua kuri kakanui i raro?
*I'm scared but fully alert.
Who is this man with thrusting weapon
investigating the hot moist flesh,
so pungent beneath him?*

Ka mate! Ka mate!
Ka ora! Ka ora!
Tenei te tangata puhuruhuru
Nana nei i tiki mai whakawhiti te ra!
Upane, ka upane!
Whiti te ra!
*I am dying, I'm dead!
No, I'm alive, fully alive!
a virile man
who can bring joy and peace!*

*Together, side by side
We can make the sun shine!*⁴²

You can view the [Haka here](#).⁴³

The fact that Tarrant was sentenced to life imprisonment without parole and he was the first person ever to receive this sentence in New Zealand's recent history, illustrates that reacting with emotional intelligence and using restorative practices does not mean that justice is not served to the offender and experienced by the survivors. This is incredibly important to note due to many feeling as if restorative justice condones the actions of the one who has committed the crime. On the contrary, it upholds the justice process and holds the offender accountable on several levels that are not utilized in the realm of retributive justice. This includes compassion and love for all involved, even the offender. "None of this is to imply that Jacinda is a saint or super human. Quite the opposite. The reason why she has had such an astonishing impact on millions of people, here and around the world, devastated by the massacre is because she responded in such a genuinely *human* way, a way that allowed compassion rather than political calculation to guide her actions."⁴⁴ What is not said here is that her compassion is not only for those who suffered loss and harm from this horrible incident, but her compassionate act was for Tarrant as well. Ardern chose to view everyone involved as sacred. This is never the wrong choice, but it is certainly the controversial choice.

It is clear that conflict, violence and revenge exacerbate the volatile state of the world we live in today. Topped with the notion of rage, fear and anger passed down from generation to

⁴² Dr. Valance Smith, PhD., Auckland University of Technology, Email, December 10, 2020, referenced, <http://folksong.org.nz/kikiki/indexTeRakids.html>.

⁴³ "New Zealand shooting: Man performs emotional Haka dance at Christchurch attack site," Global News, Youtube video, March 1, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YI4JIdYy_eo.

⁴⁴ Restorative Community of Aotearoa New Zealand, "Restorative Politics and the Christchurch Massacre."

generation, until humans do something different we will continue this way of destruction and retribution. It is a slippery slope, that of changing narratives, actions and reactions. Until we do, we will never see an end to conflict and violence. It is my understanding that until we comprehend what motivates humans to enact harm and address existing trauma holistically and fully, we will continue on a path of retribution and view that as healing. There are other ways of being. These different ways of being must become our new normal. They must be taught, valued and carried with an understanding that compassionate, restorative justice is not a sign of weakness. Instead, these practices illustrate not only strength, but solidarity.

Restoring ourselves, restores our relationships, our families, our communities, and ultimately transforms our world. It is with this idea of transformation that we move into the next chapter, seeking other ways to view each other and to transform our way from dehumanization to humanization. Because it is within that transformation that we find one common thread - our humanity.

Chapter 3

Creating Healed Communities Through Mindful Empathy and Compassion

Thus far that we have discerned that humanizing our enemies, viewing the sacred in all humans and treating others as we hope to be treated can lead to different, non-retributive ways of addressing harm, violence and conflict. We have also established that rage thrives, inside and outside our narratives and as we just read, quite possibly in our genes too. Restoring ourselves through transformative justice is more than forgiveness and it certainly is more than just tolerating each other. In my opinion, to practice holistic restorative work means finding and having compassion for those who have hurt you. While this may feel impossible, from the case studies illustrated, I feel it is possible. Every one of the case studies shared thus far give witness to the choice of restoration and transformation. These stories also illustrate the power of empathy and compassion.

Again, many might wonder *why*. Why would anyone suggest this type of restorative approach to harm and why would anyone ever feel as though this is worth the time and effort? Why should we react in this manner? What is in it for us? The quick and easy answer is - healing and living a life without anger, hatred and the need for vindication. Personally, I understand this on a very fundamental and personal level.

My father has always been abusive and neglectful, to my sister, my mom, my step-mom, and to me. He has also been physically abusive and as I grew into adulthood, he reverted to verbal abuse. My father feels so much rage that he has called me names, harassed me, and insulted me and my work time and time again. An abusive incident in the Fall of 2018 brought me to a place where I wasn't sure I was going to make it and suicidal ideation was a norm for several months. This one incident challenged the years of therapy I had already undergone and brought decades

of abuse by not only my father, but by my stepmother and my mother, to the forefront - including the trauma of my childhood abandonment at age 13. This incident brought me to a choice of either *never* seeing my father again, or choosing *how* I would see my father again.

I did not see my dad for several months and I sent one email that told him everything I always needed and wanted to say. When I did finally see him, I set the first, strongest and final boundaries in our relationship and I told him that if he ever spoke to me that way again, I would never talk with him and he would never see me again. Over two years later, for the most part, my father has behaved. He still tries to blame me for his abusive behavior but I simply shut that down. In this whole process, I did a lot of work on myself, because my father will never work on himself to stop his behavior. I had to do the work to enable myself to move past his transgressions. In fact, I had to do the work to move past all of my parents' transgressions and finally heal myself. This admittedly was not and is not easy, because I will never experience accountability from my dad, from my step mom, or from my mom. They will never say, *I have behaved badly. I am and I was abusive. Please accept my deepest apology. I am sorry I hurt you.*

Because of the deep, empathetic work I did for and on myself, as well as the work to understand why my parents are the way they are, I have found compassion – for myself and for them. With this, I have a relationship with my parents. It is not perfect, but it is better than no relationship or a relationship fraught with anger and constant fighting. It is true that I cannot trust my dad and I will always be ready for his abusive behavior. Yet, I am still in control and as much as he dislikes this, it is the truth. More than anything, I am at peace with myself, more than I ever have been in my entire fifty-four years on the planet. That is the restorative gift.

I believe most conflicts, small and large, stem out of experienced and unresolved personal harm and trauma. When I became a certified domestic violence advocate, I had this epiphany that violence begins at home and then spreads outward, like a virus. I even wrote a piece about it.

Domestic violence is inherently connected. As I do my work in religious extremism around the world, I am noting a relationship – violence begins in the home, in its most intimate form, and then it spreads, into our communities and throughout our nations. Then, it fans out to the far corners of our very small planet, and we see the results in places such as Syria, Iraq, and the Central African Republic. This can be a startling epiphany, but, what it says is that the place where we are to feel most safe, loved and cared for, is where we witness and experience the fundamental human condition of intimate violence in its most grotesque form.

I further pondered, “How can we expect wars on the other side of the planet to subside, if we can’t stop intimate partner violence with those we love, care about and are closest to? We need to examine, rustle with, and work on our most intimate relationships, before we can fix our worldly relationships.”⁴⁵

The very mention of talking with the people or the individuals who have caused harm has its own limitations. That is why there are different levels of restorative work. How RJ is approached will depend on who shows up. A quick side note is to recognize that this type of work needs a strong facilitator and someone who is aware of the many issues their communities are facing. Understanding that not all peacebuilding is meant to be pretty or perfect is important. Allowing silence, emotions, questions, and missteps while ensuring a safe and trustworthy compassionate space, is necessary. The trauma section of the tool-kit is very clear on this aspect. The tool-kit is not meant to be a counseling session but more, a way to allow reflection and understanding

⁴⁵ Karen Leslie Hernandez, “The Primal Connection with Domestic Violence,” *Feminism and Religion*, October 30, 2015, <https://feminismandreligion.com/2015/10/30/the-primal-connection-with-domestic-violence-by-karen-hernandez/#:~:text=The%20Primal%20Connection%20with%20Domestic%20Violence%20by%20Karen,And%20three%20or%20four%20more%20will%20die%20today.>

around all the aspects of the harm that is experienced by conflict and violence. More, the notion of self-compassion is stressed because as I have learned and accepted, accountability from those who have caused harm, many times is simply not feasible.

How does compassion play a role in RJ work? To first offer compassion, one must first feel empathy. Without empathy, compassion is not possible. Mindfulness and the ability to embody compassion are required in RJ work and in transforming those feelings of anger, to understanding. First, perhaps we need to question mindfulness and its role in holistic healing. Jon Kabat-Zinn explains how we need to understand that our thoughts and feelings are different from facts and how this effects our behavior and reactions in his book, *Mindfulness for Beginners*. "... we tend to experience our feelings and our thoughts as facts, as the absolute reality of things, even when we know someplace deep within us that is not entirely the case."⁴⁶ Kabat-Zinn also states that our narratives are our egos; they are self-centered and self-occupied. "While they may contain elements of truth, these narratives are not the entire truth of who we are. Who you actually are is far bigger than the narrative you construct about who you are."⁴⁷ I also appreciate how Kabat-Zinn reminds us that we have control. We can choose to let our anger cause harm and debilitate us and our communities, or we can choose to view the issue with a different lens. We can choose to not let the harm we have experienced rule our every movement and we can choose to respect ourselves, more than focus on what we have endured. This is not diminishing whatever our experience is and was. It is instead reframing it to allow freedom from the harmful and destructive views we carry of what has happened to us. "In the face of even the most unthinkable terrifying situations, we have a powerful innate capacity to hold whatever it is – even terror,

⁴⁶ Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness for Beginners* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, Inc. 2016), 43.

⁴⁷ Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness for Beginners*, 67.

despair and rage – in awareness and carry it differently ... As humans, we can meet and carry our hurt, our anger, our fear in new ways that can be deeply restorative and healing.”⁴⁸

It is true that unless one has compassion for self, there can be no compassion for others. I believe that being mindful of why we are hurting and understanding the roots of our trauma, enable mindful healing toward ourselves. The idea of self-compassion is not necessarily new, but it is foreign. Many people are not aware that self-compassion is an option for themselves, nor do they understand how to practice self-compassion. Many also do not understand why we need to have and maintain self-compassion. Kristen Neff and her well-known book, *Self Compassion*, as well as Jay Early’s work in *Self Therapy*, are two very important theories with straight-forward and theoretical models that are easy to grasp and leave the reader with a better comprehension of how conflict manifests inside ourselves and why self-compassionate practices create better, whole relationships.

The first experience of engaging in the idea of self-compassion is understanding the difference between forgiving oneself and self-compassion. As alluded to before, why do we need to show ourselves self-compassion for something we did not do? Personally, in regard to my father, I have come to find that by practicing self-compassion, I healed myself. Furthermore, this healing has enabled me to have better relationships with other family members, not just my father. It also helps me forge better, more whole relationships with those I meet anew. I can also say that these practices have developed a higher emotional intelligence in me as well. Personally, this is paramount to continuing to walk through the world as I do, whole and grounded, and able to respond without pettiness and retaliatory, harmful actions. More, in my practice of self-

⁴⁸ Kabat-Zinn, *Mindfulness for Beginners*, 96.

compassion, I also seek to understand why people behave as they do and in that search, I am able to offer compassion to others.

How does this approach apply to a larger conflict, such as in the Middle East or an act of violence, such as Christchurch or the Amish school shooting? Many of the people who have lived through conflict and violence suffer from a lifetime of hurt and trauma. As Neff helps us understand, those who cause us harm do not understand, or they choose not to acknowledge the impact of the harm they have caused. Therefore, they will never be able to show the compassion needed. This is why allowing ourselves to practice self-compassion is necessary. When we do this, we are in acknowledgement and care of ourselves and we understand what we need to do to heal. Neff calls this, *Awareness of Awareness*. It is in those moments when we are truly mindful, and more, we allow ourselves to feel whatever it is we are feeling. It is in those moments that we awake and are present. This is important because, “When we notice our pain without exaggerating it, this is a moment of mindfulness. Mindfulness entails observing what is going on in our field of awareness just as it is – right here, right now.”⁴⁹

Some might find that self-compassion feels like a burden, because we want that compassion from the one who hurt us. If those who cause harm cannot show compassion, then why must it be up to the survivor to practice self-compassion? Furthermore, the idea of self-compassion is not just for the one who has been harmed. To do real RJ work, self-compassion leads to also extending compassion to the offender. This is not easy and where those feelings of anger, resentment, and retaliation challenge us, they also can negatively charge us up. This is where I found Neff’s writing on responding rather than reacting, helpful. We believe what we think, but Neff says that those thoughts are passing and we do not necessarily have to *believe* them.

⁴⁹ Kristin Neff, *Self-Compassion* (New York: William Morrow, 2015), 95.

“Mindfulness provides incredible freedom, because it means we don’t have to believe every passing thought or emotion as *real and true*.”⁵⁰

I think it is important to appreciate the idea of always being mindful of what is, because we cannot change what has happened. We can only learn how to respond to our feelings and reactions. If we are mindful of what is, then we can accept what is. This references the conversation in Chapter Three around emotional intelligence, which also enables us to reach inside and do the work that will empower us with emotional resilience as well. This type of inner work and reaction lends to liking oneself. Some might wonder why this is important. If you do not like yourself, how will you like others? If we do not love ourselves, we certainly cannot love others. This is about understanding ourselves, trusting ourselves, and giving ourselves the breadth we need to fall down and get back up again. Early writes, “... loving yourself really means loving each of your parts. Befriending yourself means developing a relationship with each of your parts and having them trust you.”⁵¹

Violent conflict almost always involves severe physical transgressions and many times, death. Every region that URI is present in has endured lasting, religiously motivated violence, as well as the lasting effects of conflict. These atrocities also lend to the hateful rhetoric and demonization that continues for decades and centuries. As those stories of trauma are passed down from generation to generation, so too are the hateful words accompanied with the narratives of violence. As I shared previously, words matter and I witnessed this in Hebron. In their book, *What We Say Matters*, Judith Hanson Lasater and Ike Lasater emphasize that we must humanize whenever possible, especially when we are challenged by enemy images. Those

⁵⁰ Neff, *Self-Compassion*, 90.

⁵¹ Jay Early, *Self-Therapy* (Larkspur, CA: Pattern System Books, 2010), 132.

narratives and stories that are passed down from generation to generation are what exacerbate conflict and hate. As difficult as it is, we must not only change those narratives, but we must look deep inside and note the images we have created in our minds.

Transforming enemy images does not mean we give up passion for our values or belief in our cause ... We can certainly disagree with other's actions and choices ... But the practice of nonharming is to see the other person as a human being who is suffering, as we all are, and to think, act, and speak from compassion.⁵²

I believe this is exactly what Jacinda Ardern did for the Christchurch shooting. She did this in a lens of compassion and with respect to the Islamic faith.

Frank Rogers reminds us in his book, *Practicing Compassion*, that we need to ask, "Do I genuinely feel open to a compassionate connection with this person?"⁵³ Does this question matter? In some cases, I do not think it does. A woman who has been sexually assaulted has no desire for a compassionate connection with the man who has caused her trauma. Yet, perhaps and most importantly, we need to stress that a woman who has been violated can connect compassionately with herself, because this could lead to her self-healing. It is difficult for women who have been violated to forgive themselves, especially if they are from a culture that will not forgive her, even if she did nothing wrong but suffer violence to her body. We must always consider how women and girls, especially, respond once they have experienced trauma. Serene Jones writes in her book, *Trauma and Grace, Theology in a Ruptured World*, on how trauma maintains complex dynamics that must always be redressed and understood. I think this is especially relevant for women.

Traumatized people feel utterly abandoned, utterly alone, cast out of the human and divine systems of care and protection that sustains life. Thereafter, a sense of alienation, of disconnection, pervades every relationship, from the most intimate familial bonds to

⁵² Judith Hanson Lasater and Ike K. Lasater, *What We Say Matters: Practicing Non-Violent Communication* (Boulder, CO.: Shambala, 2009), 970.

⁵³ Frank Rogers, *Practicing Compassion* (Nashville, TN.: Fresh Air Books, 2015), 83.

the most abstract affiliations of community and religion. When trust is lost, traumatized people feel that they belong more to the dead than to the living.⁵⁴

Being mindful, having empathy and acting with compassion can be a double-edged sword. Being in tune with what hurts is not easy. Many choose to shut out the pain and never deal with it. This is very common with those who have lived through violence and conflict, hence why Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is real and very prominent in trauma survivors around the world. URI has a multitude of trauma survivors who are a part of the network. It is only when the trauma is addressed, will those who have suffered harm can work toward some semblance of peace within themselves and their communities. This work is imperative for sustainable self-compassion and for the compassion of others. Healing oneself as much as is feasibly possible is the most productive way of moving forward and having compassion for others. “Actions that embody genuine compassion can sometimes require careful reflection and painstaking discernment. Actions that are genuinely compassionate will resonate with and sustain the healing and renewal that has been nurtured all along the way.”⁵⁵

How does one practice genuine compassion? I find it interesting that some have to work to find compassion for others. We have recently witnessed with Covid19, a massive lack of compassion. Mask deniers and refusal to wear a mask, the hoarding of certain items, gathering in small spaces, and those that traveled when they should not have. These acts have gripped our nation and world, and left us reeling from the lack of compassion and empathy from many. It is mind numbing and has led me to understand that so many people have no comprehension of what real compassion is and how compassion must be a lived, consistent effort. As Rogers

⁵⁴ Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace, Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 50.

⁵⁵ Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 113.

writes, “Genuine compassion,” for it to make a marked difference, “is embodied in acts of restorative care, and they offer insights on the forms that embodied compassion can take.”⁵⁶

I believe that ultimate compassion stems from the ultimate acceptance and recognition of everyone as a sacred human being. The notion that we see all other humans as sacred, as I believe God made us and views us, is difficult. This ideology means that we would easily recognize and acknowledge sacredness in people such as Adolf Hitler, Slobodan Milosevic and Donald Trump. This feels bad to many and impossible to most. Recognizing the divinity in each and every one of us, even those that cause great harm, doesn’t mean we are offering forgiveness or even acceptance. Instead, it is offering us, those that have been harmed, a way to view our common humanity. “Understanding the deeper cry of another’s soul has the capacity to move us ... and it activates a loving connection.”⁵⁷ This is an important reminder that those who cause great harm and hurt others, have almost assuredly experienced hurt and harm themselves.

Conflict on the other side of the world, where abject violence in the name of country, politics, or religion are a norm, almost always requires someone to blame. The harm caused by these conflicts is full of unspeakable acts and many never speak of what they have experienced due to the trauma. Jones shares that many times trauma can stunt dialogue and inherent processing. “Violence has a traumatizing effect on one’s capacity to imagine grace, particularly in relation to language.”⁵⁸ I can attest that this is very true. Not only from my personal experience with my father, but from what I witnessed in Israel and the West Bank.

I believe many, not all, of those who cause harm want to forgive themselves. They want to make amends. They want to hold themselves accountable. They want to be seen as human

⁵⁶ Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 109.

⁵⁷ Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 89.

⁵⁸ Jones, *Trauma and Grace, Theology in a Ruptured World*, 92.

beings. If we, as people of faith are going to act in our faith, then we must act from the place that asks us to love and forgive everyone, even those who have caused harm. Because ultimately, God or whatever higher power someone believes in, holds these people in light and forgives them. This is what most faith traditions teach.

Each person we meet in the course of our days, in the course of our journeys ... each one is held in the web of love. Each person is surrounded by a cosmic circle of care and beheld by a face whose eyes gaze upon him, or her, as beloved. Holding others in the light of this love opens our heart more fully toward them. And it deepens our connection to the cosmic compassion whose expansive reach extends to even those lost and in the margins of society.⁵⁹

In the next chapter, we will explore the concept of *Ubuntu* and how it binds humans together in an inexplicable belief of a universal bond that connects us all. *Ubuntu* tells us that we cannot exist without each other and without recognizing our common humanity. This concept of mindful forgiveness, empathy, compassion and reconciling, returns us to the question of *why*? Why is this important? Because what we have done for years, isn't working. We continue this cyclical process that brings us back to where we started, again and again. We must open ourselves up to a more vulnerable approach and one that allows us to heal. The importance of this approach is in the next and last chapter.

Empathy, compassion and mindfulness can literally change how we view and heal from harm. This is true for not only for ourselves and our communities, but for our nations as well. Each and every one of us has the innate capability to mindfully change our narratives, to forgive ourselves, to practice self-compassion, and to offer compassion to our offenders. Narratives, violence and conflict might be a norm, but so are these practices. This way of being can literally save lives, including our own lives. We each have and carry the power to mindfully heal, not only ourselves, but our community and the world.

⁵⁹ Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 84.

Chapter 4

Forgiveness, Restoration and Transformation – The Case for Reconciliation

Carl Sagan, in his work entitled *Pale Blue Dot*, reminds us that our life here on earth is fleeting. Why spend it fighting, hating and striving for domination? When we are all deceased, the earth and the universe will not remember us and certainly will not care who we were. The people currently inhabiting the earth, however, deeply care about what humans leave behind in their wake.

Look again at that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it, everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every "superstar," every "supreme leader," every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there--on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.

The Earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena. Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that, in glory and triumph, they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot. Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants of one corner of this pixel on the scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner, how frequent their misunderstandings, how eager they are to kill one another, how fervent their hatreds.

Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale light. Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves.

The Earth is the only world known so far to harbor life. There is nowhere else, at least in the near future, to which our species could migrate. Visit, yes. Settle, not yet. Like it or not, for the moment the Earth is where we make our stand.

It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ "A Pale Blue Dot," Planetary Society, accessed December 1, 2020, <https://www.planetary.org/worlds/pale-blue-dot>.

For me, Sagan says all we need to understand about our time here on Earth. He posits this notion that in the end, what power if any, we have and had does not matter. This short time we are granted here on Earth spent in conflict and causing harm is not, I believe, how our Creator would want us to live. All sacred scripture demands that we care for each other and the earth. Every faith tradition and belief system teaches humility, love and care for all sentient beings. Part of this care is practicing forgiveness and restoration of each other and our humanity. Rabbi Jonathan Sachs writes about the importance of choosing forgiveness over revenge and retribution. “Nothing is more dispiriting than the cycle of revenge that haunts conflict zones and traps their populations into a past that never relaxes its grip.”⁶¹

As discussed throughout this paper, our idea of justice is wound up in “getting back” at those who have caused harm and until we make a conscious choice to change this way of thinking, we will continue to move in this cycle that never allows for true healing. The Maori’s ideas and notions around justice revolve around seeking healing first. This was illustrated earlier in this paper and is the crux to restoring oneself and community. In *Justice as Healing, Indigenous Ways*, justice in the Maori tradition stems from a restorative and reconciliatory approach.

Justice wears many different faces, and yet in essence it is a constant ... essential to our existence. Justice is the means by which we, as humans, keep our world balanced. Its measure is the sense of harmony and well-being felt by the individual and reflected by his or her actions within the community. Justice, then, is a communal asset of great value to the spiritual and physical well-being of any community. The ultimate product of justice is social stability based on consent by consensus.⁶²

The concept of justice must be reinterpreted, because humans are programmed to understand punishment or incarceration, or even death, as justice. Perhaps there needs to be a different word

⁶¹ Jonathan Sachs, *The Dignity of Difference, How to Avoid a Clash of Civilizations* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 178.

⁶² McCaslin, *Justice as Healing, Indigenous Ways*, 135.

created or established to help us understand a new way of being. A justice bound with the idea of healing. I have to wonder how someone put to death for harming another, can lead to healing. In my eyes, healing is peaceful, dedicated to the whole being and should instill a feeling of calm and holiness. The forms of justice humans practice worldwide do not lead me to believe that this type of healing is occurring.

Earlier, I pondered if RJ and reconciliation are the same as forgiveness. It seems we cannot have one without the other. It definitely feels as if they both must work in tandem within a justice framework. If I were to order a successful RJ and transformative process, it would be: *Forgiveness, Reconciliation, Restoration and Transformation*. If these concepts work in tandem within a restorative justice and interfaith peacebuilding lens, we need to recognize that their roles are very different and yet these concepts create and justify the end goal of peaceful coexistence.

It is also important to understand the complexities of forgiveness. In his chapter, *Sikhism and Restorative Justice: Theory and Practice* by Pashaura Singh, found in Hadley's book, Singh helps us understand forgiveness as an overarching process.

It is true that forgiveness, compassion, mercy, understanding, and related virtues facilitate the process of reconciliation ... one must recognize the boundaries of forgiveness. Forgiveness is not condoning or excusing. It is neither overlooking a wrong, nor trying to forget about it. Nor is it the appropriate moment for forgiveness when one is in the midst of trauma, struggling to get on with one's life. Rather, the real moment of forgiveness comes only when we consider the offender in new ways as a vulnerable person and look at the wrong as an event and not some ongoing trauma. This will be the beginning of emotional healing, and at that point forgiveness becomes a courageous act. In other words, forgiveness is a creative act, which heals by restoring people to community, by recognizing the mutuality of guilt.⁶³

This is admittedly a stark contrast in the practice of the forgiveness we witnessed from the Amish. Their forgiveness was immediate and as was quoted, this is how they live their lives. One

⁶³ Pashaura Singh, "Sikhism and Restorative Justice: Theory and Practice," in *The Spiritual Roots of Restorative Justice*, ed. Michael Hadley (New York: State University, 2001), 203.

might wonder if that type of forgiveness is theologically bound and if it is prone to the immediacy of the event. It would have been interesting to check in with this community a year from the shooting, to see if indeed they still felt the same way. Theology in practice may tell us how we need to act and what we should believe, but that does not necessarily mean that is who we are. I believe this helps us to understand that within the restorative justice framework, there are many levels of enlightenment and practice. Every single person will be in a different place in an RJ process. This must be acceptable, understood and normalized.

I am very interested in how the concept of *Ubuntu* integrates within restorative practices. Kenyan literary scholar James Ogude explains this African philosophy by writing of the effects of Ubuntu on communities.

Ubuntu is rooted in what I call a relational form of personhood, basically meaning that you are because of the others. In other words, as a human being, you—your humanity, your personhood—you are fostered in relation to other people. People will debate, people will disagree; it's not like there are no tensions. It is about coming together and building a consensus around what affects the community. And once you have debated, then it is understood what is best for the community, and then you have to buy into that.⁶⁴

I believe this could also be used to interpret what theological coexistence is and can be. We can sit in our dogma, or we can choose to see the good in all, our relationship to all, as well as build consensus.

Bishop Desmond Tutu writes of the philosophy of *Ubuntu* and reminds us that we are trying to address the many issues we know we have created. Tutu acknowledges the difficulties in this daunting work. In his book, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Tutu notes that not only are we on a path where we have a choice, but without forgiveness we have no future. We can choose to honor each other, or we can choose not to honor each other.

⁶⁴ Steve Paulson, "I am Because We Are: The African Philosophy of Ubuntu," *The Best of Our Knowledge*, <https://www.ttbook.org/interview/i-am-because-we-are-african-philosophy-ubuntu>.

There is a movement, not easily discernable, at the heart of things to reverse the awful centrifugal force of alienation, brokenness, division, hostility, and disharmony. God has sent in motion a centripetal process, a moving toward the center, toward unity, harmony, goodness, peace, and justice, a process that removes barriers. None as an outsider, all are insiders, all belong.⁶⁵

This is an important reminder as to why people cause harm in the first place. They are outsiders, perhaps marginalized and they are angry at something they perceive as an injustice. This could be personal or in a wider context, and they need and desire validation. People need to know that their existence matters. This is an issue in and of itself. It is an important reminder that as humans we tend to exclude and demonize. If we do not change these attitudes and our ways of being, then this work will not matter, nor will it be effective.

How can we instill the idea of *Ubuntu*, accompanied with the actions of forgiveness, reconciliation, restoration and healing, in to our way of living and being? In my mind, it means we must recognize and understand the origin of the trauma, mindfulness and self-compassion, as well as recognizing the humanity in each and every one of us. As mentioned earlier, the practice of the Golden Rule humanizes and discourages harm.

In an RJ context, *Ubuntu* and the practice of *Ahimsa* are interconnected. *Ahimsa*, in Sanskrit, means *noninjury*. One of the oldest philosophies that stems from at least the 3rd Century BCE, *Ahimsa* has a literal meaning of noninjury toward all, including animals and the earth. Hindu, Buddhist, and Jains have adopted this way of being and it is an important reminder of how care and acting with ultimate compassion makes a better world. The Venerable Thich Nhat Hahn writes about *Ahimsa* in the book, *Buddhist Peacework, Creating Cultures of Peace*, “The Sanskrit word, *Ahimsa*, literally means nonharming, or harmlessness. To practice *Ahimsa*, first of all we have to practice it within ourselves. In each of us, there is a certain amount of violence

⁶⁵ Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 201.

and a certain amount of nonviolence. Depending on our state of being, our response to things will be more or less nonviolent.”⁶⁶ Hanh stresses what I mentioned earlier, that self-compassion ultimately relieves the pain we feel inside and allows healing.

To practice ahimsa, we must first learn ways to deal peacefully with ourselves. If we create true harmony within ourselves, we will know how to deal with family, friends and associates. To practice ahimsa, we need gentleness, loving kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity directed to our bodies, our feelings and other people. Real peace must be based on insight and understanding, and for this we must practice deep reflection – looking deeply into each act and each thought of our daily lives. With mindfulness-the practice of peace-we can begin by working to transform the wars in ourselves.⁶⁷

I am certain that this all-consuming notion of ultimately recognizing the divinity of all beings is difficult. I would like to posit however, that recognizing the divinity and humanity in every human and living being is different from seeing it. In my mind, seeing the divinity in someone is recognizing everything they have done and are capable of and still choosing to recognize their humanity on a very fundamental level. Practicing *Ahimsa* is practicing *noninjury* in all ways, mentally, emotionally and physically, to all living things, beings and to the Earth. This fundamental connection and philosophy is bound in all we have read. When we choose and practice *Ahimsa*, we choose and practice *Ubuntu*. This can only lead to mindful, compassionate responses, which then can lead to forgiveness, reconciliation, restoration and transformation.

This is more than radical love. Some might never create space enough to practice this type of response when reacting to harm or violence. The latter feels a bit like an internal prison where our mind and heart will never heal. Harboring anger, resentment and a desire for revenge does not sound like a whole, holy life to me. I believe we can see this illustrated in the response from the Amish.

⁶⁶ Thich Nhat Hahn, *Buddhist Peacework, Creating Cultures of Peace* (Somerville, MA.: Wisdom Publications, 1999), 155.

⁶⁷ Hahn, *Buddhist Peacework, Creating Cultures of Peace*, 158-159.

This does not mean, as we've noted, that the Amish of Nickel Mines found forgiveness easy. Still, forgiveness probably comes easier for the Amish than it does for most Americans. Genuine forgiveness takes a lot of work – absorbing the pain, extending empathy to the offender, and purging bitterness – even after a decision to forgive has been made. Amish people must do that hard work like anyone else, but unlike most people, an Amish person begins the task atop a three-hundred-year-old tradition that teaches the love of enemies and the forgiveness of offenders. An Amish person has a head start on forgiveness long before an offense ever occurs, because spiritual forebears have pitched in along the way. Like a barn raising, the hard work of forgiveness is easier when everyone lends a hand.⁶⁸

Forgiveness such as this is the most healing act one can do for themselves, their communities and their nations. Forgiveness is practicing *Ahimsa*.

For true reconciliation we must embody this way of being. The URI's Preamble, Purpose and Principles are very much aligned with reconciliation. Beginning with,

We, people of diverse religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions throughout the world, hereby establish the United Religions Initiative to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings,⁶⁹

From the very beginning, URI and its network have grounded themselves in embodying ways to coexist, to care, and to create bridges to peace. Not only within the organization itself, but in the communities and nations where URI is present. URI accomplishes this every day, while acknowledging the value of diversity not just in faith traditions, but in all beliefs and indigenous communities as well.

I believe that humans carry an innate sense of what is right, just and good. Because if not, we would not have lasted this long and would have destroyed ourselves entirely by now. Conflict and religiously motivated violence have existed for thousands of years. We must choose to re-learn. Hate is taught, but so are love and acceptance. Narratives, both good and positive, as well as negative and harmful, can literally change our paths and create a lifetime of repeated behavior.

⁶⁸ Kraybill, *Amish Grace, How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy*, 140.

⁶⁹ "URI Charter," United Religions Initiative, Accessed November 27, 2020.

Revisionist, transformative forgiveness and reconciliation leads to change. All must be involved in the role of healing including the victims, the offenders and the bystanders.

If the process of forgiveness and healing is to succeed, ultimately acknowledgement by the culprit is indispensable – not completely so, but nearly so. Acknowledgement of the truth and of having wronged someone is important in getting to the root of the breach. Forging and being reconciled are not about pretending that things are other than they are. True reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the pain, the degradation, the truth.⁷⁰

Understanding actions, as mentioned Chapter Two, is paramount to the path of ultimate restoration. We can forgive and we can hold ourselves accountable as well. If we do not understand why things happen, then the existing, negative narratives will continue. While we have already read how existing narratives exacerbate conflict, the goal is not to forget narratives and their role in existing conflicts. On the contrary, we want to acknowledge, embrace and be mindful of our narratives. However, we also need to remember that narratives can hinder forgiveness, accountability and healing. Within RJ and peacebuilding, the moral imagination and how it affects narratives, as well as models of reconciliation must be understood. We can create new and healing narratives, from existing narratives.

One way in which restorative justice can bring about this change on both individual and systemic levels is through the cultivation of vivid and expansive moral imagining among its participants. The narratives, metaphors, and symbols of a restorative moral imagination allow and encourage people who draw upon them to engage in activities of moral imagining in their processes of ethical discernment. Since the realization of justice as equity requires vivid and expansive moral imagining, restorative justice practices that foster these activities better enable their participants to be equitable in their responses to stakeholders in particular cases. As participants in restorative justice enter into each other's stories and appreciate one another's perspectives, as they draw connections among their experiences, and as they envision myriad possibilities for a different future, they are empowered to attend to the particulars before them. As a result they are more likely to realize justice as equity than if they were restricted to mandatory or routine sentencing options that occlude the particulars of each case.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 215.

⁷¹ Amy Levad, *Restorative Justice: Theories and Practices of Moral Imagination* (El Paso, TX.: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC, 2011), 221-222.

John Paul Lederach also discusses the importance of narratives in his book, *The Moral Imagination, The Art and Soul of Peacebuilding*. Lederach notes that when speaking to those from indigenous traditions especially, they almost always mention the lack of acknowledgement of the earth in narratives. They also mention that many times, indigenous communities after years and years of displacement and the recipients of horrendous violence and oppression, often times are not mentioned or even considered in peacebuilding narratives. “When deep narrative is broken, the journey toward the past that lies before us is marginalized, truncated. We lose more than just the thoughts of a few old people. We lose our bearings. We lose the capacity to find our place in this world. And we lose the capacity to find our way back to humanity.”⁷² I have been careful to recognize the immense importance of indigenous wisdom in the tool-kit. With an entire section dedicated to indigenous practices, as well as connecting workshop participants to the earth, this small section touches on the much wider importance of this grounded and needed connection of *Utu* (Restoration and Balance), as well as peacebuilding.

In order for justice to work it must work for all, not just for some. It is also important that justice cannot be forced. In regard to *Ubuntu*, there is a sense of consensus. Justice, just as interfaith peacebuilding, must be all-inclusive. When doing RJ and interfaith peacebuilding work, there are no set expectations. It must be approached as an evolving process that may or may not find a perfect balance. This can be confusing for those doing this work because then the idea of dualism takes hold. Megan Shore writes in her book, *Religion and Conflict Resolution, Christianity and South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, about this concept.

Religious versus legal justice; restorative versus retributive justice; systemic versus individual justice; amnesty versus punishment; and symbolic reparations versus socio-economic justice. These dualisms have often defined the terms of debate and at times polarized the ideological commitments of those involved in assessing the process. This polarizing effect is, I want to suggest, most noticeable when interlocutors fail to embrace

⁷² John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 147.

the inherent tensions in these dualisms, thereby entering into debate with a dichotomous either/or position.⁷³

Most faith traditions, beliefs and indigenous practices remind us of the ultimate love and duty to recognize the humanity in each and every one of us. We are reminded that there is a supreme *being* and a universal acceptance that we all belong and that the earth and all its systems birthed us, support us and enable us to thrive. I especially appreciate how the Sikh tradition understands and conveys this philosophy and theology. Visiting Professor of Religion at Union Theological Seminary, Simran Jeet Singh explains this as *Oneness*:

Guru Nanak's first teaching, and the first teaching to appear in Sikh scripture (Guru Granth Sahib), is the term *ik oankar*. This term refers to the oneness of divinity, a singular connective force that permeates every aspect of this world. In a prayer that Sikhs have sung every evening for centuries, Guru Nanak wrote, 'The same divine light pervades everyone and everything.'⁷⁴

I also feel this speaks to the theology of coexistence as well. There is a single force that connects us all to our divinity and the divinity of the entire universe. I think humans fundamentally know and understand this on a profound level and recognize how this affects our reactions to harm. I also believe however, that those who seek revenge over our collective divinity, do so because it feels good. Rabbi Sachs shares Michael Ignatieff's thoughts on this.

The chief moral obstacle in the path of reconciliation is the desire for revenge. Now, revenge is commonly regarded as a low and unworthy emotion, and because it is regarded as such, its deep moral hold on people is rarely understood. But revenge – morally considered – is a desire to keep faith with the dead, to honour their memory by taking up their cause where they left off. Revenge keeps faith between generations; the violence it engenders is a ritual form of respect for the community's dead – therein lies its legitimacy. Reconciliation is difficult precisely because it must compete with the powerful alternative morality of violence.⁷⁵

⁷³ Megan Shore, *Religion and Conflict Resolution, Christianity and South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 142.

⁷⁴ Simran Jeet Singh, *500 years after his birth, a reflection on the life of Guru Nanak*, <https://www.sikhnet.com/news/550-years-after-his-birth-reflection-life-guru-nanak>, Accessed November 11, 2020.

⁷⁵ Sachs, *The Dignity of Difference, How to Avoid a Clash of Civilizations*, 187.

It is true - *Hurt people, hurt people. Healed people, heal people.* I can attest as someone who has been deeply hurt, physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually, this is true. All the work I have accomplished has healed me in a way I never imagined. If all of us who have experienced harm, healed ourselves in this manner with all the tools presented in this project, we would have less violence, in our homes, our communities, our countries, and in the world. If this project has taught me anything, we must restore ourselves individually before any sort of restoration can take place communally. A reminder of what restorative justice is and what it does.

Restorative justice offers a philosophical and theoretical worldviews for looking at crime and wrongdoing. The theoretical framework provides a way to organize how we think, feel and see. The restorative justice theory guides our processes and actions, while also helping us understand the processes by clarifying the concepts, principles, and values on which they are based. Restorative justice philosophy incorporates some core values and principles. It is a harm-centered and need-centered approach to a criminal act which is thought of as harm to 'individuals, their property, their relationships, and their communities. It is inclusive and encourages the active participation of those who have direct interest ... Values such as accountability, open communication, caring, empathy, responsibility, fairness, respect, transformation, reparation/healing, and empowerment are key to the process. Moreover, restorative justice processes take into consideration the whole context of the crime.⁷⁶

A final question - *How can we have reconciliation and healing among faith communities, when many times faith is utilized to cause harm?* Even more harmful, is when clergy and religious leaders are part of the incitement of violence. We have seen this time and time again with the radicalization of Christians, Muslims, Jewish, Hindus, and even Buddhists who have blown themselves and others up, committed genocide, and who kill indiscriminately. It is then that people of all faith experience the ramifications of this incitement and all are left not knowing how to stand in their faith without feeling betrayed.

⁷⁶ McCaslin, *Justice as Healing, Indigenous Ways. Maori Justice*, 298-299.

If transformation is going to occur among faith communities within a restorative lens, then everyone involved must be brought into the process and must be held accountable. In the book, *Radical Reconciliation – Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism*, authors Allan Aubrey Boesak and Curtiss Paul DeYoung help us understand this by writing about when Preaching Professor Richard Lischer once questioned religious leader's roles in religiously motivated violence.

After Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Vietnam, Cambodia, Rwanda, all the words seem hollow. What does one say after a televised beheading? The proclamation of God's justice or God's love meets a wall of resistance first in the throat of the proclaimer, then in the ears of the hearer.... When the message of Jesus Christ can be Nazified or made the tool of racism, anti-Semitism, apartheid, or capitalism, it is time for preachers to shut up and take stock of themselves.⁷⁷

Lischer's words are startling and sobering. He raises the question of culpability, especially among religious leaders in the incitement and condoning of violence. A world where faith and indigenous leaders always seek reconciliation and restoration over violence and harm for an injustice, is necessary for theological coexistence. They know that healing and reconciliation ultimately lead to peaceful societies.

A final example of how two religious leaders held themselves accountable and changed both of their community's narratives is the story of Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye. Their Interfaith Mediation Center in Kaduna, Nigeria, is also a URI Cooperation Circle. As shared in the tool-kit, this case study exemplifies the positive outcome of interfaith peacebuilding and restorative justice practices. The conflict between Christians and Muslims

⁷⁷ Aubrey Boesak and Curtiss Paul DeYoung, *Radical Reconciliation – Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism* (New York: Maryknoll, 2012), 10.

across Nigeria has a long history. The story of the Imam and the Pastor can be viewed in a video entitled, *[The Nigerian Reconciliation That Offers A Roadmap Back From Extremism.](#)*⁷⁸

As shared on the URI website, in the 1990s, Pastor James Wuye and the Imam Muhammad Ashafa led opposing sides of the deadly conflict in Kaduna, Nigeria. Each man was deeply rooted in his own faith tradition. Pastor James had felt a strong calling to the Church since graduating high school. Imam Ashafa is the thirteenth generation in his family to become an Imam. Both men felt a passion to unify and energize their faith communities and to protect them against perceived threats. As the conflict escalated, both men trained militias to intimidate and murder members of the opposite side. Crops, homes and livelihoods were destroyed, and families were attacked. The need for revenge on both sides fueled a growing hatred and they both became entrenched in the violence. They also both suffered major losses. Imam Ashafa lost two brothers and his mentor in the conflict. Pastor James lost many close friends and he lost his right hand.

As the conflict continued, both Pastor Wuye and Imam Ashafa decided that they needed to change the narrative. In 1995, during a UNICEF outreach program about child immunization against polio, the two leaders cautiously agreed to put aside their differences for the sake of their communities. They realized that together, their voices could convince more people to protect their children against the constant threat of violence. Their agreement was very guarded at first. As they continued to work together over the years, they built up a deep respect and trust in each other. Eventually, they formed the Interfaith Mediation Centre, which is an interfaith, grassroots organization that heals rifts between Christians and Muslims throughout Nigeria. With over 10,000 members, they now train former militia members to become peace activists.

⁷⁸ “The Nigerian Reconciliation That Offers A Roadmap Back From Extremism,” Journeyman.TV, YouTube video, January 5, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFh85K4NFv0>.

It is clear that Imam Ashafa and Pastor Wuye's work together emulates restorative, peaceful leadership in their communities. They have illustrated that peace is possible. They teach members of youth militias peaceful methods to resolve their conflicts without retaliation. Their work and actions literally involve everything I have included in this paper to achieve this desired outcome:

- Interfaith Peacebuilding – Christian and Islamic Theology
- Restorative Justice Practices – Inclusive of all those whom have caused harm, as well as holding each other and themselves accountable
- They practice the *Golden Rule* – Recognizing that they needed to stop the violence and treat everyone how they want to be treated, as well as how they want their communities treated
- They practice the philosophy of *Ubuntu* – *I am, because you are*
- They recognize the *sacredness* in each other and their communities
- They practice *Ahimsa* – Choosing *noninjury* to not only each other, but their communities
- They recognize the importance of several actions, reactions and philosophies - That each of these leads to the next: Respect, understanding, reframing narratives, listening, dialogue, building emotional intelligence, seeking empathy, the role of faith and belief, accountability, healing
- Both the Imam and the Pastor use mindfulness, compassion and self-compassion in their work with each other and their communities
- Which ultimately led to forgive, reconcile, restore and most importantly, transform themselves
- Not only did this transformation enable them to create their center, but the communities in their country have been transformed as well
- Where hatred and violence once ruled, both Imam Ashafa and Pastor Wuye literally brought theological coexistence to the forefront of their own lives, their families and their communities - With restorative and transformative justice practices rooted in their faith

This case study might be an anomaly, but it does not have to be. In fact, both Pastor Wuye and Imam Ashafa have emulated their faith in its most purest form with their forgiving, transformative actions. Within Christianity, forgiveness is one of the most important tenets of faith. Pastor Wuye illustrates this with his actions and this is illustrated in Hadley's book, where a quote from Donald Shriver states,

Forgiveness in political context, then, is an act that joins moral truth, forbearance, empathy, and commitment to repair a fractured human relation. Seen in the light, forgiveness promises to deliver on learning from the past to actually transcend endlessly recycled violence in response to victimization. Forgiveness liberates us from the very core of our violent impulses.⁷⁹

Furthermore, Imam Ashafa has also followed the path of forgiveness, which is also an important tenet of the Islamic faith. It can be said that the entire *Qur'an* is message of forgiveness and mercy. Several Surahs illustrate this, one of the most notable being: "When they are angry, even then forgive. (al-Shura; 37).⁸⁰ More however, I believe that Imam Ashafa understands the context of the conflict in Nigeria, which is mandated within Islamic Law and restorative justice practices. "Such extreme miscarriages of justice must be understood within the socioeconomic and political contexts of particular societies and have a number of causes."⁸¹ While restorative/transformative justice is so much more than forgiveness, we can surmise that Pastor Wuye and Imam Ashafa's forgiveness has led them to where they are today. Their actions serve as a reminder for us all that we can choose healing over all other choices.

This type of reconciliatory work offers the opportunity to better ourselves, as well as create better communities and a better world. We may never eliminate dehumanization and conflict all together, but I wholeheartedly believe that we can and should offer new ways of seeking justice.

⁷⁹ Hadley, *The Spiritual Roots of Restorative Justice*, 121.

⁸⁰ Hadley, *The Spiritual Roots of Restorative Justice*, 167.

⁸¹ Hadley, *The Spiritual Roots of Restorative Justice*, 166.

Finally, a basic framework of combining RJ and Interfaith Peacebuilding did not exist, until this project. While there are many ideas, practices and philosophies included in this project, it is ultimately how we re-learn to react when we experience harm – individually and collectively. Many of these ideas and practices will help heal those who have experienced trauma. For others, it will not. Likewise, many of these ideas may work in one region of the world, but not in another. This is just a beginning framework to a much bigger and wider scope of peace work. My hope is that it will enable change and healing.

Walking in our faith, practicing restoration and seeking transformation allows for change that will and can eventually lesson conflict or could eradicate conflict all together. Like URI's Principle 9, ***We practice healing and reconciliation to resolve conflict without resorting to violence***, I will continue to strive for a world where anger, retribution, hate and violence never thrive. Instead, I will hope and work for a world where we recognize the sacredness of every living being and the Earth. Because each and every one of us deserves justice and to live with dignity and in peace.

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